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ABSTRACT

The first chapter of this handbook on communication for alcohol and drug (AOD) use prevention coordinators describes why this book is labelled "unauthorized." Four reasons are given; the book: discusses frankly the difficulty of enlisting supervisors in the cause; minces few words about interacting with colleagues or kids; describes what ought to be done when the media ignores concerns; and recommends dropping one's professional cloak of respectability. The second chapter discusses sizing up the role of the AOD coordinator, including management, program development, and communications responsibilities. The third and fourth chapters focus on communicating and working with key audiences. The four major audiences are described as follows: individuals/groups who can fire the coordinator; individuals/groups who can make or break the program; individuals/groups who share the AOD's concern; and school children. The fifth chapter discusses fitting communications into the AOD program. The sixth chapter presents tips on communicating like a professional. The seventh chapter discusses working with the media. The eighth chapter presents ways to select tools for effective communications, discussing written communications, press releases, school-based communication outlets, and prevention/awareness events. In the conclusion two summary statements are provided: know who one intends to communicate with and frame the right argument to the right people. Helpful resources and references are listed. (ABL)

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COMMUNICATION HANDBOOK

for AOD Coordinators

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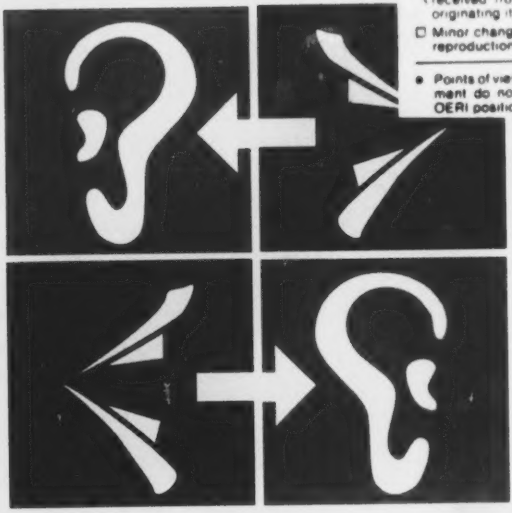

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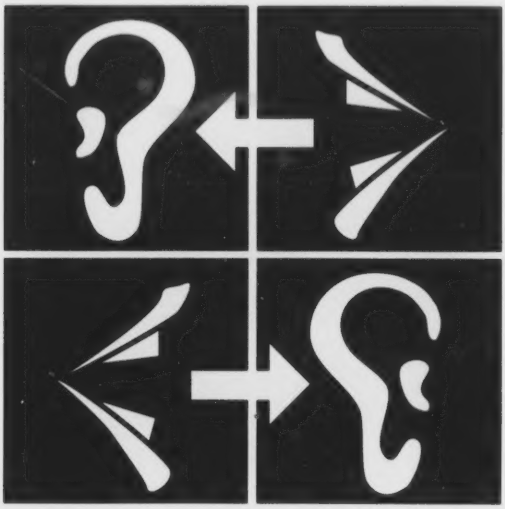
COMMUNICATION HANDBOOK

for AOD Coordinators



Joe Schneider, Carol Thomas, Diane Yoder
Southwest Regional Laboratory

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PREFACE

Communication is a key component of the work of the Western Regional Center for Drug-Free Schools and Communities. The Center has a responsibility to work with schools and communities to increase awareness of successful programs and policies in preventing or reducing student use of alcohol and other drugs (AODs). As part of this effort, the Center decided to develop a handbook to assist AOD coordinators in their communications role.

Prior to developing the handbook, the authors met with several district AOD coordinators and asked them to identify their communications concerns and problems. The AOD coordinators said they needed help in developing strategies to communicate information about their district's AOD program activities. They also asked for information to develop effective prevention messages and ways to get the message heard.

This communications handbook is intended to provide information and strategies to help AOD coordinators in their communications role. The book's chapters are full of ideas that will help AOD coordinators understand how to send and tailor messages for the audiences that receive AOD messages. We hope this document encourages and facilitates the effective communication of prevention messages and makes the AOD coordinator's important role a little easier.

Judith A. Johnson, Director
Western Regional Center for Drug-Free Schools and Communities

CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

When we first sat down to produce this handbook, we never figured it would turn out to be "unauthorized." But during the planning stage we met with a group of alcohol and other drug (AOD) use prevention coordinators and asked them about their needs, problems, and frustrations. Whoa, we said to each other. We can't begin to address those kinds of concerns in an *official* document...we'd all get into trouble if we did.

So we asked the AOD coordinators how helpful it would be if we did our usual job of producing a sanitized, acceptable-for-all audiences handbook. They were polite, and we thanked them for that. But they also told us not to waste our time, or theirs. They didn't need another official handbook that steered away from the real problems of being an AOD coordinator.

What you have in your hands, then, is about as "unauthorized" as any of us dare to get. For example, we talk frankly about the difficulty of enlisting your superintendent in the cause—something our AOD coordinators think is absolutely essential. We also mince few words about interacting with your colleagues. Or talking to kids. And we come clean about what you ought to do when the media ignore your concerns. That's to say we freely admit that sometimes the only way you'll ever get the attention you need is by dropping your professional cloak of respectability and going zealot for awhile.

At one point we thought about including a whole lot of information about messages. This is a communications guide after all. But we changed our mind. We concentrate instead on *audience* and *medium*. Frankly, a lot of what passes for "officially approved" messages appear to be little more than meaningless slogans and unrealistic exhortations. Rather than come up with a list of "unauthorized" messages, we decided what you say is your business. Our book will help you better understand how to *transmit* messages and how to *tailor* them for the audiences that you want to receive them.

We don't believe anything we say will upset AOD coordinators who are, after all, our intended readers. We're not sure about everyone else, though. So AOD coordinators might want to keep this irreverent guide to themselves. If something we say provokes a reaction and you want to talk about it, call us (213/598-7661).

Go Ahead, Use This Book

This book is an unauthorized "how to..." manual. Consequently, nothing could be more appropriate than to begin it with a "how to use this book" section. We don't expect you to read the whole book. After all, it isn't authorized. But we do suggest you spend a minute looking over our chapter headings. You might get a clue about where to stick your bookmark.

1. Introduction

You've already read the introduction. Move ahead.

2. Sizing Up the Role of the AOD Coordinator

The life of an AOD coordinator isn't an easy one. And one of the chores that makes it so tough is communicating what you are all about to numerous audiences, most of whom could care less about you or your message. Well, you can't run away from the need to communicate with others. So we give you some notions of what that responsibility might mean to you.

3. Communicating With Key Audiences

This is the toughest chapter to get through. It's theory driven. That means it has its share of confusing concepts. We think it's the most important chapter in the book. And if you're serious about communicating effectively, you will, too.

4. Working With Key Audiences

We know, we know, you've got to say publicly that your most important audience is the kids. Your most important audience consists of people who can fire you or terminate your funding. In this chapter, we discuss how to communicate effectively with such people.

5. Fitting Communications Into Your AOD Program

This chapter discusses how communications fit into the broader context and discusses the key messages that should undergird your communications efforts.

6. Communicating Like a Pro

This chapter is full of tips to help you improve your communications skills. You'll learn, for example, that writing like a pro is nothing more than learning a six-word formula.

7. Working With the Media

Do you know what day of the week your news release is most apt to get published in the daily newspaper? You will after you read this chapter on helpful hints about working with the media.

8. Selecting Tools for Effective Communication

This chapter is our "bag of tricks" gleaned from years in this business of communicating about AOD programs. We don't mind sharing.

9. Conclusion

10. Helpful Resources

In preparing this book we had to do some reading ourselves. As long as we went to all that trouble, we figured we ought to annotate some of the helpful resources we found.

11. References

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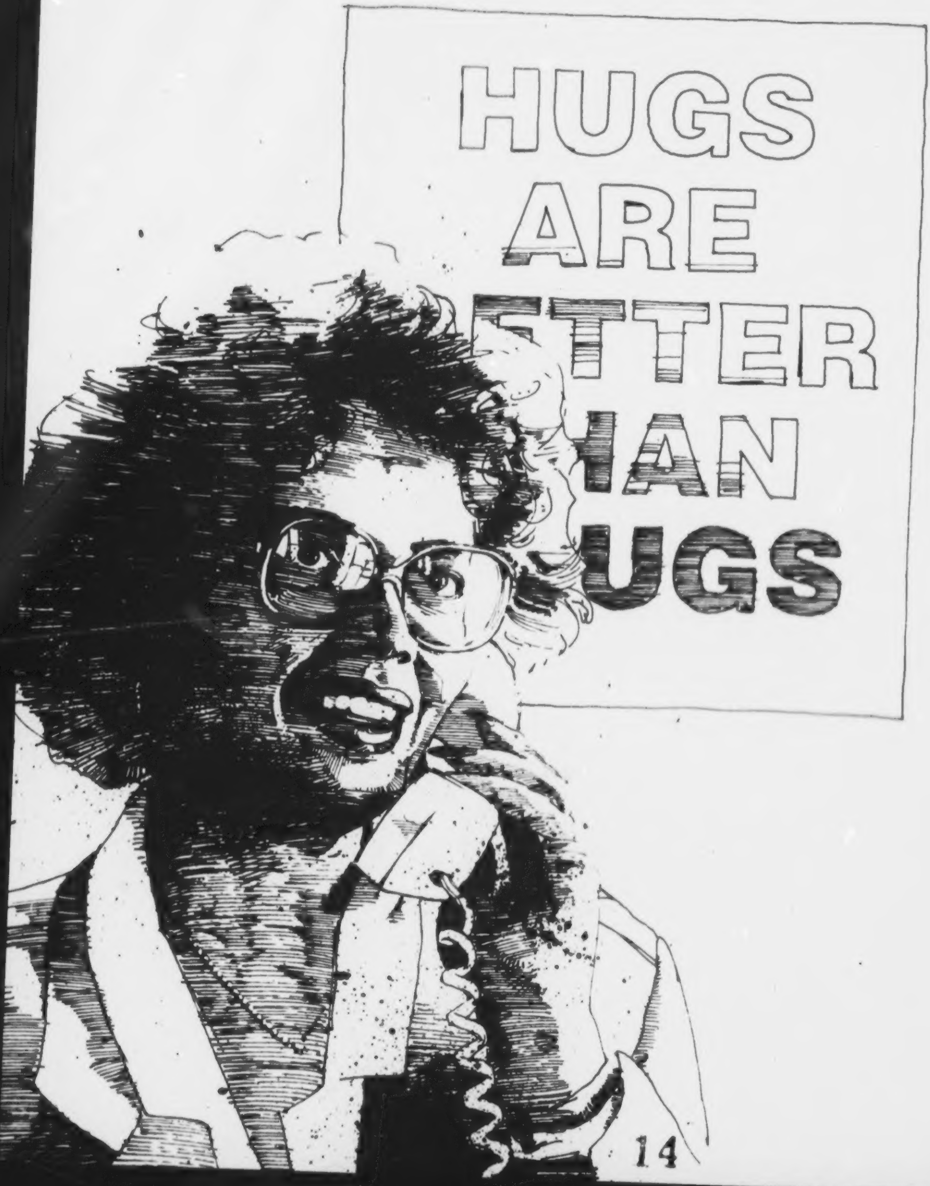
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CHAPTER 2

SIZING UP THE ROLE OF THE AOD COORDINATOR

Every AOD coordinator knows what the job entails. After all, AOD coordinators all have job descriptions. Yours must include "communications." Otherwise, why would you be reading this book?

Others besides us think communications are an important part of the AOD coordinator's job. Consider the following three statements, for example.

> The U.S. Department of Education, in its *What Works: Schools Without Drugs*, states: "School officials should recognize that they cannot solve the drug problem alone. They need to get the community behind their efforts by taking action to increase community understanding of the problem through meetings, media coverage, and education programs" (1988, p. 29).
>
> The Office for Substance Abuse Prevention (OSAP) of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services believes "For maximum effectiveness, prevention strategies need to address parental and peer influences, teachers, and community leaders; social norms about alcohol and other drug use; the marketing and availability of alcoholic beverages; and laws, regulations and policies. Communication plays an important role in all these goals" (1990, p. 3).
>
> The White House's National Drug Control Strategy (1989, September) said that when discussing prevention: "What does work is a more confrontational approach in which

> every facet of society clearly communicates that drug use is unacceptable. Schools have a major role to play in prevention, not only by presenting accurate information about drugs, but also by developing and enforcing firm, consistent policies that discourage their use and sale" (p. 47).

The basic responsibility of most AOD coordinators is to develop and coordinate the implementation of a comprehensive program related to *alcohol, drug, and tobacco use* prevention in grades K-12. Most of an AOD coordinator's program implementation responsibilities can be grouped into management, program development, and coordination/communication duties. What the following list indicates is the sample of the variety of communications skills required to function in the job.

Two Management Responsibilities

1. Monitor program expenditures to ensure fiscal accountability.

2. Coordinate state and federal funding for project activities and prepare corresponding reports.

Three Program Development Responsibilities

1. Analyze prevention curricula being used and make recommendations to implement a comprehensive program, grades K-12.

2. Coordinate program planning, materials development, material acquisition, staff in-service training, and evaluation procedures.

3. Assist in the development and implementation of policies designed to enforce policies regarding drug-related infractions in a supportive and consistent manner.

Eleven Coordination/Communications Responsibilities

1. Develop concepts and strategies for programs and projects that concern AOD use prevention.

2. Coordinate and facilitate the functions of the AOD program advisory committee.

3. Promote and coordinate active involvement by parents, business, and community representatives, and the police department in the implementation of school-based programs on drug use prevention.

4. Coordinate parent education meetings related to substance use prevention with groups, such as the PTA, Neighborhood Watch, and the school-site parent groups.

5. Serve as a district representative at related community meetings.

6. Work cooperatively with the police department in your program implementation.

7. Cooperate with the site-based staff at the elementary and secondary schools in the planning and coordination of AOD use prevention and early intervention activities, including student support groups, program implementation schedules, teacher inservice, and parent awareness programs.

8. Promote and coordinate related efforts with local institutions of higher learning, county departments of education, and health agencies.

9. Serve as a liaison with area private schools for federally and state-funded programs.

10. Provide information to faculty, staff, parents, and students.

11. Disseminate information about the program goals and services to district personnel, the community, and state and federal agencies.

Five Thoughts About Your Communications Role

1. One thing seems obvious: You can't do your job if you're not a communicator. And the more effectively you communicate with others, the better you'll do your job.

2. An AOD coordinator has three basic messages to communicate about youth's AOD use:

   (a) such use is unhealthy, illegal, and unacceptable;

   (b) any situation that contributes to use is detrimental to the students, school district, and to the community as a whole; and

   (c) such situations will not be tolerated.

3. The communications job facing an AOD coordinator is more than any one person can handle. An AOD coordinator, in other words, needs friendly allies. Consequently, a key part of your job is to identify these friends and provide them with the tools they need to assist you.

4. If your AOD coordinator role is just one of your responsibilities, you have our sympathy. Part-time generally means you do a full-time job for half the pay. If this is your lot in life, then you need to be efficient. And that goes double for your communications role.

5. Steal ideas from others in the business. Don't be bashful about it. You don't have time to reinvent the wheel. If someone has put your thoughts into words, and you like the way they sound, use them. Yes, of course, give credit to others when you borrow their ideas or words.

Ten Skills for an AOD Coordinator to Master

The reason why this is an unauthorized guide is that we're offering AOD coordinators tips and information that they otherwise might not glean from training, staff development, or formal instruction. Our 10 skills for an AOD coordinator to master are good examples of such information.

These are skills you'll learn on the job, skills you'll grow into. You may have already mastered a few of them, but chances are you'll be as green when you become an AOD coordinator as your more seasoned colleagues were when they started. Be patient; you won't master these skills overnight.

1. Believe in and Model What You're Doing

You're selling something, so believe in it. You're selling AOD use prevention and if you don't believe in it, your audience won't—no matter what the communications goal, strategy, or tactic is. Any doubts or disagreements will filter through your work in deceptive and subtle ways. You must guard against that to ensure that every prevention communication task you undertake carries your message in the best possible way.

Furthermore, you have to model the healthy behaviors you're selling to people. You can't smoke, abuse alcohol or use illegal drugs, or exhibit risk-taking behaviors while you're an AOD coordinator. If you don't model what you're trying to get others to do, your audience will see you as hypocritical.

2. Be Your Own Cheerleader

When things are getting you down, get yourself up. Don't let the arduous workload and seemingly insurmountable challenges hamper your work. Keep your enthusiasm and energy levels up.

3. Accept That You'll Have to Work Long Hours

Occasionally you'll spend an evening or weekend at your desk finishing your work while many of your coworkers will be long gone. Don't let that upset you—it's not going to change. Your job requires a substantial amount of work that won't be done unless you do it. On the other hand, a healthy life is a balanced one, so keep your perspective.

4. Be Prepared to Juggle Many Assignments

You will have any number of projects going at one time. And just when you think you're on top of one project, another one will fall behind due to circumstances beyond your control. (The copy machine breaking is one that happens all too often.) And remember that AOD-related emergencies don't wait for a lull in your schedule. You've got to be able to "switch gears" at a moment's notice.

Do whatever you have to when you're trying to organize yourself. Keep a detailed daily planner, make checklists, use a wall calendar, and regroup as often as you need.

5. Promise Less and Deliver More

When you begin to plan your activities, don't get carried away promising to do every idea you have. You have to set realistic goals to short-circuit the blame that others will be ready to place on you when you don't fulfill expectations. Many projects will take a lot longer to complete than anticipated and you'll end up looking like you're not doing your job because you didn't meet your objectives. Know the probability that you can complete a job on time and within budget before you promise to do it. You'll look better when you accomplish more than you promised.

6. Don't Take Deadlines Too Seriously

We know. You've heard it all your life: Don't miss a deadline. Keeping deadlines can be crucial to many industries. And without a doubt, certain communications jobs are a series of deadlines, like a newspaper job. As an AOD coordinator, you don't have a daily paper to publish, so go easy on the deadlines.

This may run counter to your work ethic. It shouldn't. The truth is, as far as communications are concerned, hardly anyone will remember that a publication was a day late, but everyone will notice if the publication is ridden with errors, bad work, and sloppy layout. It's that simple. Don't be obsessed with time constraints that are meaningless once they've passed. Most of the time, your publics won't even know your deadline. Rather, concentrate on the quality of your work. Your publics will zero in on that, judging you and your program relative to the quality of your work.

7. Make Planning a Constant Activity

Planning should be a regular activity for an AOD coordinator. You should constantly evaluate your performance and your activity objectives. You need to stay focused, and the only way to do that is to know where you are in your game plan at every step of the process.

8. Manage Conflict and Solve Problems

AOD coordinators have to be able to work with a variety of people on shifting ground. You have to juggle competing priorities and ideas and keep people on common ground, ready to move forward in spite of their differences.

9. Don't Hesitate to Ask for Help

Many AOD coordinators tend to work alone. They might have trouble recruiting volunteers and might not have access to a secretary.

You need to recruit others to help you. Teamwork is so important to people in the communications business. Your program will flounder if you work in a vacuum. Still, you shouldn't work in isolation. Your program can't be person-dependent because when you leave, your program will go with you.

You'll need the help of other adults like parents, teachers, and principals. You'll need the help of other AOD coordinators–especially when brainstorming ideas. And you'll need the help of kids. You'll need them to buy into your AOD use prevention messages and your program goals. Otherwise, even the most stellar efforts will fail.

10. Be Able to Motivate Others

There are certain people you'll deal with whose assistance is crucial to the success of your program. Principals are a good example. If principals don't buy into your program, you will have a difficult time getting your activities and curriculum into their schools, gaining the cooperation of the school-site staff, and getting release time for teachers and students.

Read Chapters 3 and 4 very carefully. Everything you need to know about motivating others is there.

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CHAPTER 3

COMMUNICATING WITH KEY AUDIENCES

This handbook is a "how to do it" manual. That suggests it's long on suggestions and short on theory. But a little theory now and then can stimulate our thinking and broaden our perspective. It also can help explain the obvious.

A lot of theory undergirds effective communications. Fascinating stuff; advertising, public relations, and publicity big shots spend hours pouring over the latest research for insights into how to get people to pay attention to something they had never thought of. But that's for your private reading. We're here simply to help AOD coordinators improve the likelihood that what they communicate is received by the intended audience and acted upon.

A lot of communicating is nothing more than showering a disinterested audience with broadcast or print messages audience members either ignore or soon forget. Many frustrated communicators have reacted to this reception by simply increasing the number of messages they distribute. When that fails, they either second-guess their own skills or, as likely, write off their audiences as disinterested, nonreaders, or just plain stupid.

Truth is, many communicators expect too much of themselves. Worse yet, they allow their supervisors to expect too much. Really effective communications, and by that we mean the kind that changes people's attitudes and their behaviors, are tough to pull off. In fact, the probability of success is so low, communicators have to constantly play cheerleader for themselves or else they get discouraged and quit. Or, as an alternative, they forget about impact and concentrate instead on counting the number of press releases issued, the telephone calls made, and the hours worked. That "feel good" self-evaluation may be just what the AOD coordinator needs to get through the week.

But since we're among friends, let's be candid for a moment. Sure, you want credit for your efforts. But you also want your efforts to have a payoff. What we're telling you is that you will only have a payoff with a limited number of people. The quicker you identify those people and learn how to communicate with them effectively, the greater your likelihood of success. By the same token, a lot of people you send messages to won't give them a moment's thought. Don't worry about it. Concentrate on those individuals among your audiences who you know will communicate with you. These are people who believe your district and/or community has an AOD problem, who believe they can do something about it, and who feel a personal involvement with the problem.

We're making a major point here, so we'll repeat it for emphasis. All those kids, teachers, parents, supervisors, school board members, reporters, and perhaps even spouses who *don't believe* (a) the community has an AOD problem, (b) they could do anything about the problem anyway, or (c) it is any concern of theirs, will pay little attention to your communications.

We all communicate to people who don't read or listen to us. But that doesn't mean we should. Or that we ought to brag about it. Direct-mail advertisers spend enormous sums of money, for example, to ensure that things they send you in the mail are opened, read, and acted upon. They increase their impact if they know how much money you spend on a given product; the kind of store you normally purchase it at; and your age, income, and marital status. Politicians do the same. They want to know who you voted for the last time; how you describe your party affiliation; and such things as age, income, and education. Well, AOD coordinators ought to have some sense of their audiences, too.

Now we're not suggesting AOD coordinators will ever get so sophisticated that their messages are pinpointed to the perfectly matched audience. But that's not a bad goal.

Before we go any further, we need to define two terms that we'll use a lot in this chapter. Acquaint yourselves with them; you'll find them handy to use, and explain, in your own planning.

What's the Difference Between an "Audience" And a "Public"?

Audiences

Anybody you want to lump together as a target of your communications is an "audience." You could be simplistic and have one audience and call it "everybody." But even as you say it, you realize it isn't true. You see your colleagues as a different audience than the students. Your superintendent or supervisor may be an audience of one. Your advisory team is one and so is the PTA. An audience, in other words, is who you want it to be. It's an individual, a group, or even a crowd. It is whomever you want to communicate with. Generally we identify our audiences by employing convenient labels: for example, all elementary school principals, all support personnel, all parents, all high school students. Audiences are designed, in other words, for our own convenience. One could be as small as an individual or as large as you care to make it. The important thing to keep in mind is that it's yours—you define it, you defend it.

Publics

"Publics" are a different breed. Whereas an audience is something you create for convenience, a public is something that exists whether you like it or not. A public consists of individuals who detect the same problem and plan similar behaviors to deal with it. An effective communicator can enlarge a public and facilitate its actions. On the other hand, a communicator can anger a public, fuel its discontent, and even create an enemy out of one. But a communicator can't disband a public. An audience, because you invented it, is known to you. You can say, for example, that all the classroom teachers in your district are an audience and therefore they all get a regular monthly bulletin from you. Another audience might be the parents of the children within the district's schools. You might have a different newsletter that goes to them. A third audience might be the general public you intend to reach through the community's media. Publics, on the other hand, are not something you invent. They exist out there even if you don't recognize it. And they're not easily grouped by occupation, age, sex, or any of the other common boxes we use to sort people so that we can provide order to our lives.

Publics consist of people who face a similar problem, recognize its existence, and organize to do something about it. For our purposes, we can say a public is a group of people who live in your community; recognizes the existence of its AOD problem; and through some sort of action has taken a step to do something about it.

We have more on publics later. But let's go back to audiences for a moment. You have four you need to be concerned about.

Four Major Audiences

The AOD coordinator's four major audiences are:

1. Those Individuals/Groups Who Can Fire the Coordinator

Let's face it. Regardless of who else reads your memos and press releases, hears your public service announcements, or gives you feedback on your activities, the key individuals are those who fit into that small group of people who can fire you or terminate your program.

An audience of such individuals/groups might well include:

(a) school board members;
(b) district superintendent;
(c) supervisor;
(d) funding agencies;
(e) program auditors; and
(f) advisory board.

2. Those Individuals/Groups Who Can Make or Break Your Program

You can't eliminate or stem AOD use yourself. Your job depends on the willingness of others to get involved and help do the work. Consequently, these individuals are a key audience for your efforts.

A list of these individuals/groups would include:

(a) school district colleagues;
(b) parents and parent groups;
(c) social service agency personnel; and
(d) students.

3. Those Individuals/Groups Who Share Your Concern

Another group of key audiences consists of all those who share your concern about the AOD problem. Needless to say, this group is a mixed blessing. Some will want to be allies in your efforts to eliminate AOD use. Unfortunately, many of them will have their own ideas about how best to accomplish that task. Consequently, the more you communicate your approach, the more you may find some of this audience in opposition to your efforts. You can't ignore this audience, though. Because of their expertise, status in the community, and power bases, you had better figure out a way to enlist those audience members who support your efforts and to at least placate those who might advocate a different approach. Some of these key audiences would include:

(a) local and state governmental agency staff members;
(b) technical assistance providers;
(c) law enforcement officers;
(d) members of community groups and service clubs;
(e) business and industry leaders;
(f) members of religious groups; and
(g) parks and recreation staffers.

4. School Children

Let's face it. Your ultimate audience is school children. And a lot of what you do is designed to communicate messages directly to them. When talking publicly, savvy AOD coordinators will say children are their primary audience. Privately, AOD coordinators need to recognize that children are not likely to make or break the program, influence a change of AOD coordinators, or leverage the funds for the program. So while children are an important audience, AOD coordinators who concentrate all their energies communicating with children are probably going to earn the "zealot" label. Later on we're going to suggest that "going zealot" has its place. But if your concerns about student AOD problems keep you isolated from adults, then your effectiveness will be limited. An AOD coordinator, to be successful, has to recognize that all four audiences are important. Concentrating on the children and neglecting the information-seeking needs of supervisors or funding sources are surefire ways to ensure zero impact.

These four audiences together constitute a lot of people. And because we've already made the point that they're all important, the AOD coordinator had better figure out a way to communicate effectively with each audience.

But communicating with these key audiences isn't as simple as expanding your mailing list. Remember, audiences are what you call them. But within these audiences, and across all four of them, are publics. If you're going to be effective reaching the key members of your four audiences, you had better be aware of the communications behavior of publics.

What's a Public?

Now that you know who your key audiences are, let's examine a public.

1. A Public Consists of Individuals

A public may have a handful, hundreds, or even thousands of members. Or a public may consist of one person. Regardless of numbers, a public isn't a mob. It's a collection of individuals.

2. A Public Consists of Individuals Who Detect the Same Problem

The thing that defines a public is an issue. That is, all the people who come together around a common concern constitute a public. In your case, the public you're most concerned about consists of individuals who believe your school district or community has an alcohol and other drug use problem among its youth.

3. A Public Consists of Individuals Who Detect the Same Problem and Plan Similar Ways to Deal With It

Not all people who detect a problem recognize its consequences. And not all of those who recognize the consequences discuss them with others or organize in any way to do something about the consequences. As a result, these publics differ, primarily to the extent to which they decide to do something about the problem.

What we're suggesting is that your communication role is threefold:

(a) provide information to members of your public (those among your various audiences who recognize that the district and community has an AOD problem) who want help addressing the problem;

(b) attempt through your efforts to enlarge your public by (i) publicizing the problem, (ii) explaining how your audiences can become involved in addressing it, and (iii) reducing the constraints that your audiences believe prevent them from doing anything about the problem if they do recognize it as such; and

(c) resist the temptation and pressure to "educate" or "reform" all those individuals who don't believe the district and community have an AOD problem or who feel there's nothing that can be done about it anyway. These are the hard-to-reach individuals who will absorb your resources and time and give you back little in the way of impact.

Sorting Your Key Audiences Into Publics

Professor James Grunig of the University of Maryland has devised a theory (Grunig Theory of Communication Behavior) that enables us to classify people into eight types of publics. Once you sort your audiences into these public types, you'll have a real sense about how you might communicate most effectively to each of them. Keep in mind that publics develop around problems or issues and such publics differ in the extent to which they are aware of the problem and the extent to which they do something about it.

Consequently, to determine within which of the eight publics your audience members belong, answer these three questions about them:

1. Do They Believe an AOD Problem Exists?

The first of Grunig's variables is called "problem recognition." The idea is simple. People do not stop to think about a situation unless they perceive something needs to be done about it. So, the first question you need to answer about individuals within your key audiences is: Do they believe the community or district has an AOD problem?" If the answer is "no," then you have a tough communications job. People who don't recognize the existence of an AOD problem are not apt to seek information about it or to even process information that comes before them.

But let's assume that most members of your key audiences do believe the community or district has an AOD problem. People who recognize the problem are likely to seek and process information about it. They'll do so because they need information to address the problem.

People who know that an AOD problem exists exhibit either an "active" or "passive" communications behavior. Those who are active will in fact seek information about the problem. They'll call you; they'll go to the library and read about the problem; they'll seek out their neighbors, friends, and colleagues to discuss the issue and brainstorm tactics to do something about it.

Other people who recognize the AOD problem are passive communicators. That is, they won't take time to look for information, but they will often process information that comes to them randomly, such as through one of your newsletters or perhaps an article in the local newspaper. Unfortunately, for those of us trying to communicate a message, these individuals exert less effort to understand information they process than information they seek.

What that does tell us, by the way, is that we ought to spend a disproportionate amount of time responding to people who come to us seeking information. There will generally be a bigger payoff satisfying information seekers than there will be trying to entice information processors.

2. Can They Do Anything About the AOD Problem?

Many people feel constrained when they, as individuals, cannot do anything about AOD use in the schools or community. They may not have children in school, they may be new to the community, or they may have tried before to express an opinion with a community or school official and got nowhere. Regardless of the reason, people with "constraint recognition" are not likely to seek or process information about the problem.

3. Do They Believe the AOD Problem Involves Them?

If people believe an AOD problem exists, and if they believe they are free to act upon it, the likelihood is that they will seek or process information about it. An AOD coordinator with limited funds and time will want to concentrate on those individuals within the key publics who will actively seek information rather than just process it. And the clue to determining the communications behavior of individuals is to assess their "level of involvement."

According to Grunig, people's level of involvement represents the extent to which they connect themselves with the situation. When people, for example, perceive that the AOD problem involves them, they are more likely to seek information to deal with the situation. Individuals who believe they have a strong involvement with the AOD issue generally also have high problem recognition and low constraint recognition. Consequently, they will be the most active of the AOD coordinator's publics. They will seek and process AOD information and use it to develop their own ideas, attitudes, and behaviors.

Eight Kinds of Publics Facing AOD Coordinators

Grunig has introduced us to three independent variables (problem recognition, constraint recognition, and level of involvement) to provide us with a clue about the likely communications behavior of individuals who make up our key audiences. His theory about communications behavior becomes of interest to us when we develop combinations of the three independent variables.

Here's how it works. We assume, for the sake of simplicity, that people will exhibit either high- or low-problem recognition, constraint recognition, and level of involvement. Three variables, with two possible scores (high or low), yield eight combinations of variables. Each of these eight combinations produces a distinct public. And the communications behavior of each of these eight publics closely approximates the behavior of the four publics we've already spent some time explaining: nonpublics, latent, aware, and active.

In other words, by combining the variables in different groupings, we can sort out eight kinds of publics and by so doing get a sense of the communications behavior they'll exhibit.

1. High-involvement Problem Facers

On top of the pecking order are "High-involvement Problem Facers." These are individuals who have a high degree of involvement with the AOD issue, recognize AOD use as a problem, and operate under few constraints. These individuals will be highly likely to seek and to process information and to act on it. They are members of the active public. This public will frequently include many of your parents, teaching colleagues, administrators, school board members, and students. Not all of them, by any means, but some of them.

Communication Tips

(a) When dealing with High-involvement Problem Facers, keep in mind they may already have formed an opinion about AOD use and your approach may not fit their notions of a perfect solution. Treat them as allies and work carefully to win their support. Don't assume you have it.

(b) Keep in mind that High-involvement Problem Facers are likely to seek information about AOD use from others as well as from you; in other words, you won't be their only source of information. With their own information bases, they'll feel perfectly comfortable calling your superintendent or board members to ask why it is you are not doing something or why you persist in continuing to do something else. High-involvement Problem Facers demand a lot of personal attention; without question, addressing this public is the best use of your time and energy.

(c) High-involvement Problem Facers already have their minds made up about what works and what doesn't. Find them among your key audiences who support your program and provide them with reinforcing information. If necessary, ask your supportive High-involvement Problem

Facers to work on your unsupportive High-involvement Problem Facers.

(d) Don't ever assume you can reach High-involvement Problem Facers or hold their attention through print media alone. They expect telephone calls and a lot of face-to-face interaction.

(e) You've probably already noticed that you spend a lot of time responding to inquiries from a group of individuals. These individuals have one thing in common: They don't wait for you to call them, they feel comfortable calling you. Many of these individuals are, by definition, High-involvement Problem Facers.

2. High-involvement Constrainers

A significant segment of the district's public will fall under the "High-involvement Constrainers" label. These are individuals who recognize the existence of an AOD problem in the community or district and even feel some personal involvement with the situation. But for whatever reason, High-involvement Constrainers feel powerless to make any difference. Many parents will fit into this category. They have children in your district's schools, know that children—perhaps even their own—use alcohol and other drugs, but don't believe they have enough influence to stop or prevent the use. Many children also will fall into the High-involvement Constrainers public. These are students who know of others who use alcohol and other drugs, who know the problem needs to be addressed, but who don't know how to protect their friends from their self-destructive behavior. Individuals within this public often will be active communicators in the sense they recognize a problem and feel a personal involvement with the issue. However, unless the AOD coordinator can help them overcome their constraints, they're not likely to act on the information they seek or process.

Communication Tips

(a) If members of your key publics seek out AOD information, but do nothing with it, then consider the possibility they operate under some constraint. Your communication message to them might be designed to give them tips about how they can overcome these constraints. Such messages may be particularly helpful to parents and students among your High-involvement Constrainers public.

(b) Knocking High-involvement Constrainers over the head with information about the AOD problem or the need to become involved with the issue is a waste of time. Smart AOD coordinators will seek High-involvement Constrainers among their key audiences and determine what constrains their behavior. Then the AOD coordinators will increase their effectiveness by communicating suggestions for overcoming these constraints with the various audiences (i.e., what works for children among their peers may not work for parents with their own kids).

3. High-involvement Routiners

A frustrating group for every AOD coordinator consists of High-involvement Routiners. These are well-meaning people, by and large, who think the AOD problem—at least from their own perspective—is under control. Parents whose children have graduated from high school and have left the community frequently fall into this category. So do some of an AOD coordinator's fellow teachers and administrators. At one point, they thought AOD use was a serious problem, but new problems have captured their attention. Because of their former involvement with AOD use, High-involvement Routiners frequently communicate actively about the problem. But what they seek and process for the most part is information that reinforces their perception that the AOD issue is no longer of major importance.

Communication Tips

(a) High-involvement Routiners who are colleagues within the district ought to be a prime target audience for the AOD coordinator. They are a tough audience, in that they no longer believe AOD use is the problem it once was. Still, they're worth addressing because they can influence others. Besides, the AOD coordinator's job is tough enough without having the teachers and administrators walking about saying you're working on last year's problem. Because they are still active communicators, they will at least process information you send them. By pointing out the problem and making the case that it hasn't disappeared, you might just make them High-involvement Problem Facers again.

(b) High-involvement Routiners won't be swayed much by print communication. They'll need to hear from you personally. And in many cases they'll expect you to listen to the reasons why they don't recognize AOD use as a problem. To win them over, your facts have to be in order and you have to be convincing.

4. High-involvement Fatalists

Another small public that frustrates AOD coordinators consists of "High-involvement Fatalists." These are individuals with a high involvement with the district, including its AOD program, so they would seem to be a likely audience for the AOD coordinator. However, High-involvement Fatalists no longer believe the AOD problem is as great as it once was and besides, they have too many constraints on their behavior to do anything about it regardless. High-involvement Fatalists will be unlikely to seek information or even to process it if it reaches them.

Communication Tips

(a) High-involvement Fatalists remain involved with the district. Many in fact will work there. Or have children there. But because they don't recognize AOD use as a serious problem, coupled with their inability to do anything about it if they did, they are a difficult public to communicate with. An AOD coordinator would first have to raise their awareness of the problem. Then the coordinator would have to help them strip off their constraints. Both tasks are so difficult that an AOD coordinator might well want to consider whether or not the effort is worth it.

(b) One thing about High-involvement Fatalists; they're not likely to frustrate your efforts. That is, they have a high involvement with the district and are well acquainted with your program. So if you have some among your key audiences, you're likely to worry about communicating with them. Don't. High-involvement Fatalists can be ignored while you invest your communication efforts elsewhere.

5. Low-involvement Problem Facers

The only difference between High-involvement Problem Facers and "Low-involvement Problem Facers" is—you guessed it—their level of involvement in the AOD issue. Both groups recognize the problem and have nothing that prevents them from doing something about it. However, Low-involvement Problem Facers are a little less likely than their more involved colleagues to do anything about the problem. Both publics, though, are active communicators about the problem, both believe they know the solution, and both think they can do something about it. The Low-involvement Problem Facers may well be members of your advisory groups, colleagues within the district, and leaders within the business community. One logical reason for their low involvement may be because they have no children in the public schools. Students who fit into this category may be those who do not engage in AOD use and who have no friends who do.

Communication Tips

(a) Keep in mind that Low-involvement Problem Facers would be High-involvement Problem Facers if they just felt more involvement with the district's AOD program. If you have Low-involvement Problem Facers among your key audiences, figure out ways to increase their involvement.

(b) Don't ever assume you can bring Low-involvement Problem Facers into your band of supporters through print media alone. They'll require a lot of personal attention. Frankly, you may discover that Low-involvement Problem Facers are that for the simple reason they don't buy your district's approach. Consequently, you have to decide if you're willing to change your behavior to increase their involvement.

(c) Low -involvement Problem Facers are much less likely than their more involved colleagues to seek information. Don't be fooled by their silence; they are active communicators and will process just about anything you get to them. You'll know you've increased their involvement when they start calling you for information.

6. Low-involvement Constrainers

"Low-involvement Constrainers" are individuals who recognize the AOD use problem, but have little personal involvement with the issue and probably for that reason believe they have too many constraints on them to do anything about it anyway. Consequently, they might process information that reaches them, but they're not likely to seek information on their own. They're also not likely to do anything as a consequence of the information they receive. A good many members of what we call the "general public" fit this mode.

Communication Tips

(a) An AOD coordinator ought to think twice before wasting much effort trying to involve Low-involvement Constrainers in the district's efforts. They already believe an AOD problem exists, so you can't win them over by making the case for your program. But they have little personal involvement with the issue and believe that if they were to get involved they couldn't have much effect anyway.

(b) Keep in mind that many people involved in the broader AOD prevention movement (e.g., state and federal officials and AOD leaders) will qualify as your Low-involvement Constrainers. That is, they know about the problem and care deeply about doing something about it. However, they feel little involvement with either your community or your school district. And, because of their distance from the local situation, they believe they have constraints that would prevent them from being effective. Consequently, while you may consider state and federal officials and AOD leaders to be a key audience for you, don't expect this group of Low-involvement Constrainers to pay much attention to your communication efforts. They may read your materials, but they're not apt to seek information.

(c) Just because your state and federal Low-involvement Constrainers are not apt to be active communicators, keep them on your mailing list anyway. You expect little effect from your communication, so you won't be disappointed. But you might get them to return the favor and put you on their mailing lists. And although you are a member of their "Low-involvement Constrainers" public, you might find an idea or two in their communications that you can use locally.

7. Low-involvement Routiners

The "Low-involvement Routiners" are a tough group to get close to. They don't recognize that the community or district has an AOD problem and they have no personal involvement with the issue. Consequently, they are not likely to ever seek information about the problem nor do much with information that reaches them.

Communication Tips

(a) Most AOD coordinators long ago thought everyone who counted knew about AOD problems. Well, the Low-involvement Routiners have not got the word yet. This is the one public that needs to be told there's a problem. Pretend this public just came in from Mars and start at the beginning to build the case that AOD use is a problem and needs attention. That won't bring the Low-involvement Routiners into active communication, but it's a start. Then you can begin giving them messages about how to get involved with the issue. With effective communications, a lot of attention, and frequent messages, you just might bring a few Low-involvement Routiners into a Low-involvement Problem Facer public.

(b) The difficulty that Low-involvement Routiners present to your communications efforts is that the message they need will bore or turn off your more aware publics that have heard it all before. Try to ensure that the more involved, problem-facing publics don't receive the communication you put together for the Low-involvement Routiners.

(c) The good news about Low-involvement Routiners is that they have no constraints on their behavior. And they're not necessarily opposed to your efforts. They just haven't been convinced that a problem exists or that it involves them. Consequently, members of this public might be educated to become some of your strongest supporters. Consider young parents with children entering elementary schools as likely Low-involvement Routiners. Get them information about the problem and present ways they can get personally involved.

(d) A final thought. Because Low-involvement Routiners are passive communicators, you might ignore them if time or resources are in short supply.

8. Low-involvement Fatalists

At the bottom of the communications heap sit the Low-involvement Fatalists. These are individuals who don't recognize the existence of an AOD problem, feel no involvement with your efforts, and believe they could be of little assistance if they wanted.

Communication Tips

(a) Low-involvement Routiners and Low-involvement Fatalists may cause you headaches. These individuals make up what your superintendent or supervisor will call the general public. You will be asked, "What are you doing to inform the general public?" You know it's a waste of time communicating with a passive public. But if you have no choice and have to do something, try to make the case for the problem. If you can just get these audiences to recognize the problem, you'll have done wonders.

(b) You are not likely to have Low-involvement Fatalists among your key publics. So when you design your communication program, concentrate your resources and energies on the key publics. Anything left over—and there shouldn't be anything left over—might be invested in long-shot communications to Low-involvement Routiners.

Concluding Comment

This very busy chapter has introduced you to a lot of the research that helps AOD coordinators communicate effectively. Let's review quickly.

1. We said you had four key audiences:

   (a) individuals who can fire the AOD coordinator;
   (b) individuals who can make or break the AOD program;
   (c) individuals who share your concerns and want to help; and
   (d) children and youth.

2. We then said audiences are what you say they are. But that doesn't mean members of your various audiences share your perception of the problem, sense any involvement with it, or feel they can do something about it. Nor does your grouping of people into audiences say anything about their passive or active communications behavior. Individuals among your four key audiences group themselves into publics. And the public they fall into depends on their recognition of the AOD problem, their sense of involvement with it, and the extent to which they operate under any constraints to cope with it.

3. Members of your audiences, in other words, fit into one of eight different publics. Half of them recognize AOD use as a problem. These are key publics that your

communications program needs to address. The other half doesn't recognize that AOD use is a problem in your community and consequently they are unlikely to seek your messages. Simply put, people communicate about problems they recognize.

4. But even those among your audiences who recognize AOD use as a problem may passively communicate about the situation. Some feel constrained and don't believe they could make any difference if they tried. Others just don't feel the personal involvement required to get involved. Each of these publics needs to be approached differently. Show the Constrainers how to overcome their constraints. Convince the Low-involvers to get involved.

5. Above all, reinforce the active communicating High-involvement Problem Facers among your audiences. These individuals will be your strongest supporters and greatest believers or, potentially, your strongest opponents and your greatest doubters.

Three Tips You Must Remember When You Forget Everything Else

You will not remember everything you read here. Fine, print doesn't disappear quickly. Come back and visit when you have time. Meanwhile, take these three tips with you.

1. Communicate With Your Problem-facer Publics

Within your audiences are two publics that are active communicators. That is, they'll engage you while you communicate with them. They have strong opinions about the AOD problem and believe they can do something about it. You must be in touch with these individuals. And your touch ought to be personal. Don't count on your newsletters and fliers to make the case with these two groups. We named them earlier. They're called High-involvement Problem Facers and Low-involvement Problem Facers.

2. Communicate With Your Constrained Publics

A large number of your key audience members will feel, for one reason or another, constrained in their ability to address the AOD problem. They fall into two key publics: High-involvement Constrainers and Low-involvement Constrainers. The former group feel involved and recognize the problem. Chances are many of your district's parents fit into this public. That is, you don't need to preach about the problem to them. But you do need to give them information about how they can get involved in your efforts to eliminate AOD use in the community and home. You get this public involved and you'll have some of your strongest supporters. By the same token, you nudge students into the High-involvement Problem-facer group and you'll have strong allies for your efforts.

3. Read Tip 1 and 2 Again

You have four other audiences besides the Problem Facers and the Constrainers. None of the four believe that your community or district has an AOD problem. If they don't believe they have a problem, they're not apt to communicate with you about it. So when push comes to shove and you can't get everything done that begs for attention, forget about the publics that don't believe your community or school district has a problem. You could double your budget, triple your staff, and still not make much of a dent on these groups. With the exception of High-involvement Routiners, who are actively communicating to reinforce their view that the AOD problem doesn't exist, the other three publics are passive communicators. And that means you'll be lucky if they even read or view your materials. But it's worse than that. Even if these latter three publics do process your material, they are not apt to act on any of it.

Bottom Line

This chapter has a bottom line.

1. You must communicate with the Problem Facers. They seek information about the problem and plan to do something about it. You can't ignore them. Particularly those Problem Facers among your key audiences.

2. You have a good chance of enlarging your supportive High-involvement Problem-facer audience if you work on ways to reduce or eliminate the constraints people feel keep them from addressing the AOD problem.

3. Actively communicating with anyone else may not be worth the effort.

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CHAPTER 4

WORKING WITH KEY AUDIENCES

Back in Chapter 3 we introduced you to the concept of "key audiences." There were four. The most important, we had the moxie to say, consists of people who can fire you or terminate your program. We all know that without adequate funds or backing, you will be hard pressed to do anything that affects children. So let's deal with what it takes to keep your real key audiences on your side.

Your Four Key Audiences

Altogether, you have four key audiences:

(a) those that can fire you or terminate your funding;
(b) those that can assist you or make your job tougher;
(c) other AOD program advocates or colleagues; and
(d) children in your district's schools.

Each of these four key audiences contains subaudiences. You know them each personally.

Six Individuals or Groups Who Can Stop You in Your Tracks

We say six. Actually, the number may be smaller or larger. But let's start with our six and you can add or subtract.

1. School Board

You probably don't have much contact with the school board. If you did, you'd probably make the next person on this list real nervous—your school superintendent. But that fact alone might give you a clue about why this is a key audience for you: If the school board is on your side, you're home free. Your budget is secure, your equipment and support staff needs are met, and your status within the district is assured. But if the school board turns on you, start looking for another job. And don't count on superintendents to put their jobs on the line to save either approaches.

Remember those eight publics we talked about in Chapter 3? Well, members of your local school board are undoubtedly Problem Facers. That is, they recognize that the district and community have an AOD problem. And being school board members, they probably feel they have the ability to do something about it. The only question is whether or not they sense any personal involvement with the AOD issue. Many AOD coordinators will find the majority of their school board members are Low-involvement Problem Facers. That means you will want to communicate messages to them that increase their sense of personal involvement in your program's efforts.

Three Communications Tips

When dealing with Low-involvement Problem Facers on the school board, consider the following three tips.

(a) Make Sure They Are Really "Problem Facers"

Remember, Problem Facers are those who recognize that the community and district have a serious AOD problem and seek information about how to cope with it. Are you sure your board members qualify? You'll know if you observe their current behavior. Have you been asked to make a presentation before them? Were they the ones who directed your superintendent to create your position? Have they asked to serve on your advisory panel? Do they participate in your organized AOD events? Have they requested information from you?

If the answer is yes, then you've got High-involvement Problem Facers. If they contact you, attend your events, and otherwise show considerable "involvement," then you've got your hands full with High-involvement Problem Facers. And that means they are already gung ho supporters of yours or thinking you are not quite up to the job. Either way, you had better spend a lot of time—high quality, personal time—dealing with these individuals. Remember, High-involvement Problem Facers look for solutions to a problem they recognize. They're more than willing to go far and wide for solutions. That means you're probably not the only authority they'll check with to confront this problem. And because they're free to make decisions and to take action, they generally will.

(b) Make Sure They're Not Operating Under Constraints

Now here's something we wouldn't say out loud in the teachers' lounge: Sometimes school superintendents keep your boards in the dark about district problems. "No news is good news" is the motto of these administrators.

If your board functions in a cloud, figure it operates under constraints. That is, its members can't be expected to seek information about a problem they underestimate or ignore. If you raise their awareness, they'll confront the superintendent. And the superintendent will undoubtedly confront you. You know your superintendent better than we do: You decide if that's the best way to ensure your future or expand your budget. Keep in mind that the superintendent might just discredit your information to lull the board back to sleep. Either way, you lose.

So, if your board is in the dark because that's where the district administration keeps it, then we can't in all honesty suggest you be the one who starts switching on the spotlights. We figure you have two choices.

One, ignore the board and work on your superintendent. If the superintendent's making all the decisions anyway, then the board really isn't a key audience for you.

Two, figure that if the community and/or district have an AOD problem, someone on the board will eventually catch on. Be ready to grasp the opportunity when the board calls you forward for a presentation or a briefing.

Keep in mind that every new board member is a potential High-involvement Problem Facer. Observe the board member's behavior and figure out which of your publics they now resemble and communicate accordingly.

(c) Show Them How to Increase Their Involvement

It's entirely likely that your board consists of Low-involvement Problem Facers. That means they recognize the problem, but don't believe they need to address it. And that probably means they think you and the superintendent have it under control or that the problem resides in the community and thus isn't a board issue.

If the latter is true, then you're back dealing with the superintendent. If the board believes AOD is a nonschool issue, chances are somebody is encouraging that point of view. And chances are that somebody is your superintendent who thinks the board is spending an appropriate amount of its time and energy on the issue, thank you very much. Tread carefully.

If the board members shy away from the issue simply because they don't know how to be of assistance, you should think about why they're in the dark. It may be accidental. It may be the superintendent doesn't know how to involve them.

Either way, before you communicate ways to involve them, you best check signals with the superintendent. With the superintendent's blessing, chances are your personal interaction with the board members could make them some of your strongest and most active supporters.

2. Superintendent

We made the superintendent the villain in our "dealing with the school board" section. We apologize to any superintendent who might have peeked into this volume. And we certainly applaud those of you fortunate enough to work for strong, supportive bosses. You are truly blessed.

Obviously, the stronger the support you receive from the superintendent, the easier your job. Superintendents can get funds for AOD coordinators. Find them staff. Buy them equipment. Give them access. Endorse their program. Gain them acceptability among their colleagues. Superintendents can do all this and more, if they just (a) recognize the problem, (b) feel a sense of involvement with it, (c) operate without constraints on their own behavior, and (d) think their AOD coordinator is doing a good job.

Questions to Ask Yourself About Your Superintendent

Don't take your superintendent for granted. We know, that sounds corny. Nobody would do that. Well, in all honesty, many of us take our bosses for granted. We figure they know what we're doing, support our efforts, and would do anything humanly possible to help us succeed. Then we get upset when we think we're left standing out in the cold.

Ask yourself the following question.

Does the Superintendent Believe We Have an AOD Problem?

Of course the superintendent does. The superintendent says so. You've heard the words directly from the horse's mouth yourself. Now ask yourself the question again. Does the superintendent *really* believe we have a problem? How would it rank alongside the budget-deficit problem? Or the teacher union problem? Or yesterday's drive-by shooting at Woodrow Wilson High? Be honest with yourself: If you were the superintendent, how would you rank-order the district's AOD problem against all the other things that need attention in the district? Perhaps you're too close to the situation to be objective. Discreetly ask the superintendent's assistants, deputies, and the public information officer where they think the boss would rank-order the district's AOD problem.

If all else fails, don't ask the superintendents—observe them. What do they give speeches to the Rotary Club about? What do they put on the school board agenda regularly? When they meet with parent groups, what do they stress? When they go off to state and national meetings of school superintendents, what literature do they bring home to share with staff?

Problem-facer superintendents are not bashful. They'll be in the AOD coordinators' faces constantly. These superintendents will drag their AOD coordinators along to meetings. Such superintendents will want facts and figures for speeches. You'll receive calls from people who say, "Your boss told me to call." If the superintendents are fans of the AOD program, they are the best friends that AOD coordinators have. If these superintendents are out in front of their coordinators, the latter will be nagged constantly. Those are the attributes of High-involvement Problem Facers.

If the superintendent doesn't recognize the problem, then your most critical audience member needs some attention fast.

Before you flood the superintendent's office with correspondence, sic the board on the poor soul, and have your friends and fans call, consider the next question.

If the superintendent recognizes the problem and takes a personal interest in working with your program, we've already defined the person as a High-involvement Problem Facer. But what if involvement is low?

Three Reasons Why Superintendents May Be Uninvolved

A low-involvement superintendent has three excuses.

(a) Hasn't Focused on the Issue

You may work for a Low-involvement Problem Facer. That's a superintendent who recognizes the AOD problem and knows something can be done about it. But for now the issue just isn't important. The superintendent may be new to the job or working real hard on another issue. Or the person just might possibly believe you are doing such a good job you ought to be left alone.

If the latter describes your situation, then let sleeping dogs lie. Chances are the superintendent supports you, speaks highly of your program, and figures the way to help you best is by not meddling. Such a superintendent isn't going to be bothered by you actively communicating with the board or other key audiences of the district.

If the superintendent is a Low-involvement Problem Facer because your efforts are new or invisible, then you have a communications task in front of you. Any effort you expend will be worth the effort. First of all, the superintendent doesn't need to be convinced a problem exists. Second, constraints are not an issue. What such superintendents need is someone to make the case for their personal involvement. Figure out what the superintendent could do that you can't. Do you need someone to kick-start the board? Rally the teachers? Endorse an activity? Meet with your advisory committee or smooth out a wrinkle with your funding source? Any or all of these activities might be what it takes to increase superintendents' involvement and make them even more supportive of the AOD efforts.

(b) Doesn't Believe the District Has a Problem

Many superintendents have learned that problems left alone sometimes go away. Is it possible that your superintendent really doesn't see an AOD problem? Could it be the problem has come and gone? At the very least, could it be the problem is now under control? (In other words, your superintendent is probably a Low-involvement Routiner.) If that's the case, then the superintendent is not seeking much information about the problem from you, isn't talking with others about it, and when asked, says it's gone or is being addressed.

Low-involvement Routiner superintendents generally will only seek out information that reinforces their belief that the problem is nonexistent or in retreat. This makes them tough to communicate with.

Assuming districts have an AOD problem worthy of their superintendents' personal involvement, the coordinators' task is to figure out new ways of bringing the issue to their attention. The first time the problem comes to their attention, coordinators might luck out and get an "aha" reaction. On the other hand, if the superintendents think they have licked the problem, the coordinators' task will be tougher. Superintendents will want hard evidence and probably more than just their coordinators saying it.

Coordinators ought to worry a little if they have Routiners as superintendents. A worst-case scenario would have them dismantling the AOD program to save money or to reduce the number of administrators on the districts' payroll. At best they will not spend much time with AOD issues or help elevate their importance among other key audiences. That being the case, they will probably expect their AOD coordinators to also treat the issue as routine. In other words, your job won't be real exciting. You'll have to bide your time until some other High-involvement Problem Facers among your key audiences gang up to change the superintendent's attitude. You have to decide how much you want to risk by urging others to boost your superintendent into the Problem-facer ranks.

(c) Knows the District Has a Problem, But It's a Low Priority

Superintendents are not unusual if they fit into a fatalistic public. We're talking here about a superintendent who ignores the AOD problem and believes nothing can be done about it anyway.

The constraints may arise from a variety of causes. Superintendents may simply believe they have more important problems to concern themselves with. Saving their jobs may be one of them. Building schools, passing a bond levy, or fighting off a strike may push the AOD problem completely off the list of their concerns.

Superintendents who ignore the AOD problem within their own districts and communities *and* who believe for whatever reason they couldn't do anything about it anyway are the worst-case scenario for our coordinators. Such superintendents will avoid the coordinators, ignore their memos, and generally resent them if they get pushy. Any AOD coordinator who has such a boss is forgiven for looking elsewhere for employment.

Some superintendents know they have a problem, but they operate under all kinds of constraints. The most common constraint is the press of other problems.

Let's assume your issue just isn't high on the superintendent's list of problems that need or deserve the superintendent's attention. Have you ever stopped to think that the superintendent may be correct? Take stock of the district's situation. Would any reasonable superintendent place the district's AOD problem on the list of issues that must get addressed or risk being fired?

3. Supervisor

Many AOD coordinators have someone between them and the superintendent that we'll call a "supervisor." We wish they didn't. Every AOD coordinator ought to be important enough to report directly to the superintendent. If it helps any, go ahead and say we said so.

Those of you with supervisors need to reread the section we wrote about superintendents. Obviously, your supervisor will influence your communications approach to the superintendent and the board will be influenced by your supervisor. Because the supervisor has responsibility for your program, we'll assume the individual is a High-involvement Problem Facer. That being the case, the supervisor will work alongside you as you attempt to communicate effectively with the superintendent and the board. If the supervisors fit into another of the publics, do what you can to move them up the involvement-problem-recognition scale.

Alas, we realize that if supervisors are not High-involvement Problem Facers, it's probably because they are High- or Low-involvement Routiners. They expect you to do your job, not rock the boat, and by all means stay away from the superintendent and the board...they've got more important things to worry about.

We'll say it again: You know the local situation better than we do. How much are you willing to gamble to go over your supervisor's head to create High-involvement Problem Facers among the superintendent and the board? Before you take this course of action, assess the likely receptivity of the audience. No sense in doing end runs if you are not likely to score anyway.

Three Common-sense Tips for Working With Supportive Supervisors

Your supervisor ought to be your strongest advocate. If that's the case, then check how well you're doing the following.

(a) Never Surprise a Supervisor

Day in and day out you'll do your job without giving much thought to your supervisor, particularly one who's in your corner and gives you a lot of operating space. So from time to time you'll put out a release, distribute a brochure, or talk to the media, and your supervisor won't even know about it. Wrong approach.

Never surprise supervisors. Put yourself in their shoes. You put out a release. The local television crew catches your superintendent at the weekly Rotary luncheon and asks about the content of the release. The superintendent doesn't know what the reporter is talking about and it shows. Back at the office, the superintendent calls your supervisor. Wow, neither of them knows anything about the press release. Now at this point the content is not important. The fact that you were just doing your job makes no difference. You have embarrassed your supervisor, kissed away any chance for recognition for your nifty press release, and probably convinced your superiors that you need a whole lot more supervision.

Nothing you send out of your office ought to come as a surprise to your supervisor. We're not saying you need to clear everything, but make sure that what the supervisor hears about your operation comes from you first. If the mayor calls, the school board president writes, or the state wires you a go-no go decision on your grant, let your supervisor know immediately.

(b) Share the Limelight

If your supervisor is a supporter, perhaps even a High-involvement Problem Facer, take advantage of it and showcase the individual. Allow the supervisor to meet with your advisory committee or to be the "authority" quoted in your press release. If you get invited to make a presentation at the Lion's Club luncheon, suggest that your supervisor make it. Be sincere, by the way. Everyone hates a bootlicker.

(c) Spread Credit Around

You know how hard you work to make a difference. So when the credit comes around, you're probably more than willing to take a bow. If you're thinking long term, you'll give credit to those who make the program possible and who cleared the obstacles from your path. Again, be sincere.

4. Funding Agencies

This can be said in a few words. If you're typical of most AOD coordinators, a large portion of your funds comes from the state. That means the state is a critical audience. Without funds, you're out of business.

The state gives your district money in exchange for your district's assurance that the money will be spent in a prescribed manner. That means you have to keep records and file reports. Do so, on time, and with enthusiasm. You may not ever meet the people who read these reports. You can figure they are High-involvement Routiners. That means they're processing information you send them to reinforce their attitude about the wisdom of providing you with funds. Your job is to make sure they get the reinforcement they're seeking. It's as simple as that.

Every once in awhile your project officer will come by for a visit. Give the individual the district's usual VIP treatment. That means a few minutes with the superintendent, a tour of one or more schools, and a luncheon session with members of your advisory committee. When the visitors leave, make sure they have a sack full of your best materials and perhaps multiple copies of some of your more popular items.

5. Advisory Committee

An AOD advisory committee has multiple duties. It advises you on your program, to be sure. But it also legitimizes the activity with the community and the school board, probably satisfies a state requirement, provides you with "clout" beyond the district, and from time to time even makes the case on your behalf for additional funds and/or support.

Just between us, you can go one of two directions with your advisory committee. One, you can keep the members at arms' length, load them down with paper, and find things for them to do that keep them out of your hair. This gives you the maximum ability to run your shop without the committee micromanaging from a distance. You've already got your hands full trying to cope with the district bureaucracy; you don't need another group of bosses, right?

Two, you can make them active partners in your effort. Train them to be communicators. Have them interact with critical audiences, such as the school board, community groups, and even your funding source. While you're at it, have them let your superintendent know how important your function really is.

Both options, in other words, have merit. You decide which is best for your situation. At the very least, though, realize that your advisory committee is a critical public. If the members are already High-involvement Problem Facers, you won't have much choice, but to make them active partners in your program. If they're new, naive, or confused, you can probably maintain them as High-involvement Constrainers. Woe be you, though, if they figure out that the only thing that constrains their behavior is you.

A final word of advice. Your superintendent may have definite views about the "empowerment" of your advisory committee. That is, your superintendent may want it operating under constraints. After all, superintendents, unless they are High-involvement Problem Facers, probably don't want another lay panel advising them about a problem they want to ignore or "kept in perspective." Again, your choice. No job is any fun if it doesn't have some risks, right?

6. The Public Information Officer

To be perfectly honest with you, we don't really believe the public information officers (PIOs) can see to it that you're fired or even rocked back on your heels very far. But the former journalists among our writing trio naturally identify with PIOs. And although they ought to be in the category we're going to discuss next, we elevated them in status and put them here out of respect for the profession. Indulge us, please.

In a perfect world, all districts would have PIOs and they would do all of your communications chores for you. After all, that's their job…fostering communications between the district and its various publics. Alas, their plates are full. Most work long days just trying to ensure that the superintendent's messages get communicated. What time they have left over is spent putting out routine newsletters, responding to special demands by all their "bosses," and troubleshooting whenever something or someone in the district inadvertently attracts unwanted media attention (e.g., drive-by shootings, teacher indiscretions, union problems, and declining test scores).

All that said, the PIO might be the AOD coordinator's best friend. After all, the PIO can write, has media contacts, and knows on a first-name basis many of your key audiences. The PIO, in other words, has much to offer you. On the other hand, an uncooperative PIO could easily become an enormous problem. Such a PIO could whisper into the superintendent's ear that your communications practices need supervision, that you're stirring some of the superintendent's key publics and need to be reined in, or that your function might best be conducted by school-site counselors rather than the central office.

Five Tips on Working With PIOs

Our best advice is to make district PIOs into friends. Obviously, it will help if they are friendly High-involvement Problem Facers. But no matter. You can work with a Low-involvement Fatalistic if you have to. You just have to change approaches. Here are some tips for working with such an individual.

(a) Find Out Where They Stand on the District's AOD Problem

Obviously, your task is easier if they share your concerns and strive for your level of involvement. So find out where they stand by talking with them. If they need to be introduced to the AOD problem, by all means do so. If they need to be told how they can be involved, explain it. And discuss any constraints they may have (e.g., a PIO will want to know where the superintendent stands; don't expect a PIO to be more active on your issue than the superintendent is).

(b) Tell Them Where the Superintendent and Board Stand

If you have strong, active support from the superintendent and school board, let the PIO know. You'll have the PIO's cooperation regardless of that person's personal views toward the problem. Be honest: If you don't have their support, tell the PIO. You might still be able to get something from the relationship.

(c) Appeal to Their Professionalism

The PIOs are skilled communicators. Okay, even if they are not skilled, they think they are. And chances are they're more skilled than you are in communications. So let's assume for a moment that the PIO could care less about the AOD situation. That doesn't mean you can't ask for help. Appeal to their sense of professionalism. Bring them real problems. For example, say you and the superintendent agree that you ought to do a feature article for the local newspaper about the district's AOD program. You should be friendly enough with the PIO to ask for feedback on a story outline, to request media outlets, to share a draft, and to obtain a media mailing list.

(d) Never Surprise a PIO

Earlier we suggested you should never surprise your supervisor or superintendent. Well, that goes for the PIO, too. Never share anything with the media that hasn't gone first to the PIO. If the PIO is on the job, the media will get your release and call the PIO's office for comment. Don't leave your PIO stammering before a reporter.

(e) Get Out of the Way

Over time you will become a first-rate communicator. Reporters will know you on a first-name basis. That means you might get calls about matters that logically ought to go to the PIO. Let's say a child overdoses in a school rest room. The media get wind of the story and call you for the district's reaction. DUCK. It isn't your job to be a district spokesperson. Be polite, but firm: Tell them to call the PIO. Then before the call can be placed, let the PIO know the call is coming. Never get between the PIO and the media.

By the same token, never put yourself between the PIO and the superintendent. A lot of PIOs write most of the superintendents' speeches. Let's say you convince the superintendent to give a speech on the district's AOD problem. You could certainly write that speech for the superintendent and might even feel it's your duty to do so. SLOW DOWN. You're about to trample on the PIO's toes. Sit down with the PIO and discuss as two professionals how you should approach the assignment. You've got the data, but the PIO knows the boss' speaking style. Why don't you do a first draft and allow the PIO to hammer it into shape? Sure, the PIO might get "credit" for delivering the speech to the superintendent. But you have the superintendent speaking on your topic. That's a win-win for everyone.

Three Audiences That Can Help You or Hinder You

All kinds of people can help you or hinder you. Let's talk about a few you can't ignore.

1. Your Colleagues

A critical audience is your colleagues within the school district. Many are probably High- or Low-Routiners. That is, they don't believe the AOD problem is all that great, unless you mean teenage beer drinking. And many of your colleagues won't even think that's much of a problem given the fact it's been around forever. Besides, your colleagues probably believe stemming AOD use isn't part of their job.

To complicate matters, you may have colleagues who are AOD abusers themselves and don't recognize the problem or care much about it if they do.

Five Tips When Communicating With Colleagues

You need to be sensitive to your colleagues. They can be of tremendous assistance to you if they buy into the program. Or they can undercut you a dozen ways.

(a) Don't Treat Them Alike

We know, for convenience it would be nice to think of all teachers, school administrators, and support staff as one audience with a common mindset. That would mean you could communicate the same message to all and even use the same medium. Nothing is ever that simple.

You really ought to know who among your colleagues recognizes AOD use as a problem. Those who don't ought to be introduced to reality. Those who do, on the other hand, ought to be involved in your efforts to address it. Finally, you ought to know what constraints, if any, your colleagues feel keep them from addressing the issue. And then you ought to help them overcome or eliminate these constraints.

(b) Identify Those Who Could Be of Most Help

Assuming you can't possibly interview everyone in the district, decide who among your colleagues is really critical. As a rule of thumb: Those closest to the children are your target audience. And they include teachers, counselors, bus drivers, secretaries, and janitors.

But that's still a large number. Maybe too many for you to interview. So who do they interact with? Principals, other building-level administrators, and teacher union representatives.

Start with the latter group of principals, vice principals, and building-level teacher representatives. Find out through personal conversation their problem recognition, their involvement, and their constraints. Then ask them to generalize about their building-level colleagues.

(c) Find Out Who Recognized the Problem

Depending on the size of your district, you could have a lot of data. Probably more than you can handle. So let's make this simple.

How many really think the district and community have an AOD problem? Most? Half? Only a handful? The answer tells you how hard you have to work to communicate to your colleagues the news that the district and community have a problem. This means that for at least some of the colleagues you interviewed—the good news is that you know who they are—need to be convinced that a problem exists. Nothing else you say about AOD use will strike a cord with them until they recognize the problem. So put together the evidence that documents the problem. Make it as specific as possible. Communicate it in writing, but by all means take every opportunity to do it face-to-face. Some of your strongest allies will emerge from the ranks of those who just didn't realize there was a problem.

(d) Increase Their Personal Involvement

Your key colleagues who recognize that the district and community have a problem should be given messages about how they could address the issue. This is how you increase their involvement. Be specific. And while you're at it, tell them how they can increase awareness of their colleagues. Make them communicators within their own buildings. Give them the literature they need, the speakers they want, and all the moral support you can muster.

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(e) Eliminate or Remove Their Constraints

The colleagues who recognize the problem and want to become involved in addressing it may feel they operate under constraints. One constraint, of course, is lack of information about what they can do to be helpful. Be prepared up front to fill this need. Perhaps the building-level administrators don't think downtown considers AOD use to be something they should attend to. So get the superintendent to make a statement about the importance of their involvement.

You won't make everyone you talk to into a High-involvement Problem Facer. But you will make some. And you will know why the others are not as committed to the issue as you are. This information tells you what kinds of messages you have to communicate to win them over. And you'll know that those who do recognize the problem and want to work with you have the tools they need to be helpful. That's what effective communications is all about.

2. Families and Parent Groups

All too often, given large numbers of people we feel we have to communicate with, we shoehorn all our messages into one brochure, flier, or meeting. Nowhere is this more apt to happen than with families.

That is, we mail home a brochure that says, "Here's the problem." Then we tell them what they ought to do about it. Period. Job done.

Well, the job isn't done. Nothing as complicated as AOD use prevention can be addressed adequately through a brochure or single meeting.

Three Tips to Enlist Families in Your Efforts

If you want families enlisted in your efforts, here are some tips for you to consider.

(a) Make Families Aware of the Problem

A brochure, flier, or meeting can help increase parents' awareness of the community's AOD problem. Be honest, straightforward, and objective. Don't preach, blame anyone, or blow the issue out of proportion. Personalize the message to the individual reader. The problem becomes real only if the parents' children are at risk. So consider whether or not a single brochure can serve all families. If you've got the resources, send one to elementary school families, another to junior high families, and a third one to high school families. Perhaps another to Spanish-speaking families. Give them district or community facts. Then explain what they ought to look for among their own children.

Don't tell them what to do about the problem. They're not ready. This hardworking brochure or meeting has to convince families a problem exists first.

(b) Show Families How to Get Involved

The problem-raising brochure ought to end with a message about what concerned families can do if they want more information. Be prepared to tell them where they can get information that enables them to:

(i) join a community group addressing the problem;
(ii) address the problem within their own home;
(iii) receive additional information about the problem; and
(iv) participate in and conduct activities that support the school AOD program.

Whenever possible, you want these information requests to come back to you. These calls or letters will give you some indication of the extent to which people recognize the problem and want to address it.

If the return is small, consider that you have not made the case or, possibly, you need to eliminate people's constraints.

If the return is large, then you have information-seeking parents and family members, and that means they're probably Problem Facers who want to increase their involvement. That being the case, you need to be prepared to respond to their need for information. That might be brochures about working on the issue at home, joining support groups, or enlisting with others in community or neighborhood groups.

Whatever you do, give these information-seeking parents top priority. That sounds logical, doesn't it? What we probably should say is that before you send a brochure or flier home or meet with parents, be prepared to respond to their information-seeking requests. Once families recognize the problem, they will expect you to do something about it. At the very least, that something ought to be additional tips for how they can address the problem at home.

(c) Help Families Eliminate or Reduce Their Constraints

A lot of families will share your perception of the problem. But their involvement will remain low because they don't believe they can do anything about it. That could be because they don't believe their children are the object of your attention.

If a school seems to have a particularly large number of AOD users, yet you've seen little interest in the problem on the part of the parents, then you may want to do a targeted mailing. Put together a flier that introduces the problem, mentioning the school by name. Then come clean with the parents and say you know they feel powerless to do anything about the problem. Offer suggestions or solutions. Give them the name or names of people they can call to get more tips about their specific situation.

Meet with the school's principal and see if you can make AOD use the subject of a back-to-school night. If the school has an active PTA, get on its agenda. Make the case for a problem. But realize that your real job is to address problems that keep parents from dealing with the situation. It may be a language barrier between the schools and families. Perhaps the parents work more than one job and are never home to supervise their children. Be prepared to deal one-on-one with each of these issues or you stand little chance of making these parents into High-involvement Problem Facers.

3. Members of Your Own Staff

You do have a staff, don't you? If you don't, skip ahead in your reading. It will just break your heart to think other AOD coordinators have someone who actually reports to them and helps bear the load.

We only have one message for those of you lucky enough to have staff. Make sure they share your enthusiasm. They will interact with your publics and you have to be sure the messages are consistent. If you are assigned a secretary who hasn't bought into the problem, then lobby for someone else. Life's too short to spend it trying to make a believer out of a subordinate.

Collaborating Audiences

Some days it may seem as if you're fighting the battle all alone. Well, for what it's worth, within your own community a half dozen other people probably are having the same thought.

These individuals are employed by government agencies; technical assistance providers, such as the Western Regional Center for Drug-Free Schools and Communities (nifty way we worked a plug for our outfit into the text, don't you think?); law enforcement agencies; community groups and service clubs; members of the religious community; and staff at the city or county parks and recreation departments.

Five Tips for Sharing the Burden

You're not alone in your struggle. Prove it to yourself by linking up with others who share your burden.

1. Organize or Attend a Meeting

Watch for announcements of local or statewide meetings of people who do what you do and attend. The group "therapy" is worth the trip. But as important, you'll pick up tips.

2. Steal Good Ideas

Good communicators steal from one another all the time. Why design a brochure for parents when the person in the district downstate has produced one that says everything you would have said had you had the time to write it? Get on an exchange list with fellow AOD coordinators in the state. Find out who the innovative ones are by calling the Western Regional Center or your state project director. When you "borrow" an idea, credit the original source. If you're really on the ball, you'll get your superintendents to put their names on a letter you write that praises the "borrowed" idea. Then you'll send that letter to the superintendent of the person you borrowed from. What goes around comes around.

(a) Get on Mailing Lists

Get on mailing lists maintained by others who do what you do or help those of you who do. State, regional, and federal agencies all have free materials for your use. If you don't know where to start, call your project officer.

(b) Team up With Neighboring Districts

You ought to be in touch with your neighboring districts, particularly if you share the same media outlets. Pay particular attention to the larger, richer districts. Let them produce the brochures and posters. Then borrow their ideas for your own use. Remind yourself that imitation is the greatest form of flattery. Work together on common objectives (e.g., getting the attention of the local media outlets).

(c) Share with Others

Get yourself into a network of local or state AOD coordinators. It's not necessary to even meet each other face-to-face. Talk on the telephone and facsimile messages back and forth. And by all means, when you have something worth sharing, do so. Sharing is contagious and to everyone's benefit.

3. Follow up on a Good Idea

Let's say your county parks and recreation department has a big summer push to get AOD information into the hands of all the children involved in its summer programs. When school reopens, you know that a good segment of your student audience has already seen the message. So, don't duplicate it; emphasize it. Plan activities that follow up.

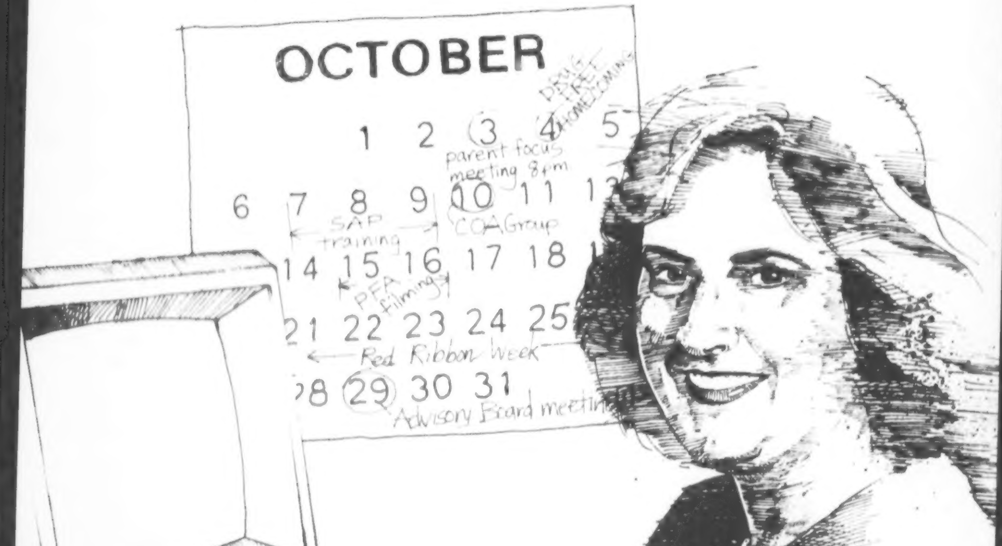
Conversely, if you have a schoolwide program going on, talk to the summer-program folks and see if they might want to build on the messages you've already been putting out.

4. Share the Cost

If the state or another agency intends to produce an AOD brochure or poster, see if it fits into your program plan. If it does, then that's one or two fewer things you'll have to develop or pay for.

5. Identify Good Buddies

Frequently community groups or social clubs want to help out, but are not quite sure how to do it. See if you can't work them into your program plan. Don't hesitate to ask them to pay part of the freight for their involvement.


OCTOBER
DRUG FREE HOMECOMING
1 2 3 4 5
parent focus meeting 8pm
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SAP training
COA Group
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PFA filming
21 22 23 24 25
Red Ribbon Week
28 29 30 31
Advisory Board meeting

CHAPTER 5

FITTING COMMUNICATIONS INTO YOUR AOD PROGRAM

We view communications as an activity you undertake to satisfy your objectives and to attain your goals. Before we talk about how those activities fit in your program, an important distinction should be made between goals, objectives, and activities.

Goals are the overarching changes you want to accomplish. An example would be to delay the onset of alcohol experimentation among sixth graders. Objectives are steps in the process of reaching the overall goal. Objectives should be identifiable steps in your program that are "specific, attainable, prioritized to direct the allocation of resources, measurable to assess progress toward the goal, and are time specific" (National Institutes of Health, 1989, p. 10). An example of an objective would be to have each student in the district receive a minimum of 40 hours of health education instruction per year. You will evaluate your progress in reaching your goal by measuring your progress in accomplishing your objectives. You need to plan your objectives and goals based on the research you did at the beginning of this phase of the process.

So where do activities fit in? Activities are the efforts that make up the objectives. That is, if your objective was to delay the age at which students begin to use alcohol, holding a presentation for families and students that explained the dangers of early alcohol experimentation by minors might be a good activity.

Recall what we quoted OSAP as saying in Chapter 2 regarding the role of communications in an AOD program. OSAP said that communications plays "an important role" in achieving the goals of prevention. In other words, to communicate is not a goal of your AOD program; it is a means in achieving your goals, but is not an end in itself.

What follows is a brief look at the components of a successful AOD use prevention program. We realize that an entire book can be devoted to this subject alone; we only intend to give you an overview and then highlight the specific areas in which communications activities can be infused. Then we'll discuss OSAP's 10 public health principles that should undergird your communications.

A Brief Look at AOD Use Prevention Programs

AOD use is a multidimensional phenomenon caused by many environmental, behavioral, and personal factors. Consequently, the programs that are most successful are those that offer a holistic approach that affects the areas that can create risk factors for drug use. A successful AOD use prevention program combines a number of strategies that target many systems and audiences and produces measurable outcomes.

Seven Components of an AOD Use Prevention Program

1. Policy Development

This step is the cornerstone of a comprehensive program. A successful program must have well-defined policies and procedures and must be based on consistent philosophy, which is supportive of students. Such a program will offer consistent messages and solid guidelines for schools and communities to deal effectively with student AOD use.

The most important policy is a statement on nondrug use. Such a statement should apply to students, school and district personnel, and any community personnel who work with students. Communications are the foundation of this program component. The development of the policy will involve communications extensively. The policy communicates values, expectations, and consequences surrounding AOD use and related issues. Communicate the district's procedures related to your policy.

2. Training

Training raises awareness, sends consistent messages, reduces denial, develops skills to implement program objectives, and develops local school district and community capacity to train. The objective of most training is to train those who will implement programs or deliver services to youth. Also, training is targeted for school and community personnel so that they become familiar with the issues surrounding AOD use, will be able to identify and refer high-risk students and students who use AODs, and will develop a working knowledge of the prevention program and develop abilities to help solve the AOD problem.

3. Needs Assessment and Evaluation

This component is critical to the AOD use prevention program. The purpose of it is to assess the frequency of AOD use problems and to understand the context in which AOD use is occurring. Knowing the level of drug use is crucial, as is knowing the characteristics of the target community.

Such a needs assessment provides an opportunity to evaluate the success of the program. In addition, this program component will provide a thorough analysis of the risk and use indicators of AOD problems in a district or community and a list of available resources.

Communications activities are a crucial part of this program component. For example, in doing the analysis, AOD coordinators will develop written evaluation results to share with the various publics and will provide evaluation reports to families and communities.

4. Intervention

The intervention component is most often seen in programs targeting middle school and senior high school students. However, many elementary schools are developing and adding intervention components to their programs. Intervention activities provide assistance so students can function in school settings and can continue to grow physically, intellectually, emotionally, and socially.

This component includes developing a procedure for identifying and referring students who may have AOD use problems, establishing, if possible, school-based support services, and, if possible, establishing a community-based network of services.

5. Prevention

Prevention activities by minors should carry and reinforce the message that AOD use by minors is wrong and harmful and that youth should not use or experiment with such substances. Such activities must target the needs of different populations (difference in race, language, gender).

Curriculum implementation is the main prevention activity conducted by schools; however, school-based prevention activities do not only include curriculum programs (Bickel, 1989). Classroom activities can be supplemented with teen conferences, after-school programs, service projects, and AOD-free events.

The objective of this component is to identify and implement effective AOD use prevention activities and education programs at the school site and in the community.

6. Family Involvement and Education

The purpose of this component is to train parents in the skills that can prevent AOD use by their children. Such skills include family management skills and communications skills. Furthermore, families should be involved in AOD use prevention activities and education at home and at the school.

Communications activities can help involve families and educate them. Newsletters, parent conferences, and informational brochures are effective communications activities to pursue with families.

7. Community Involvement and Education

This component is much like the previous one. This component seeks to raise the awareness of community members and to educate them about AOD use prevention and intervention. This component also tries to involve community members in school efforts.

Ideally, activities in this component will result in school-community partnerships and community efforts to prevent and reduce AOD use.

Communication activities play an important role in raising awareness, educating community members, and soliciting community involvement. Such activities can increase community awareness through newsletter articles, public meetings, and press releases.

Ten Public Health Principles for AOD Coordinators To Communicate

OSAP has 10 public health principles upon which communications in an AOD abuse prevention program should be based (1990, November).

1. Make It Clear that Illegal and Unwise Alcohol and Other Drug Use is Unhealthy and Harmful for All Persons

Your message should make clear that the use, production, distribution, or purchase of an illicit drug is illegal and/or dangerous. Your message also should include prescription drugs that are used improperly or by someone other than the person for whom it was prescribed. Be sure to include in your message that the use of any product that is not a drug, but that would affect a person the same way a drug would, is illegal as is the use of legal drugs by underage individuals.

2. Give a Clear Message that "Risk" is Associated With Using Any Form or Amount of Alcohol or Other Drugs

Alcohol and other drugs are not risk-free. Risks are associated with even minimal use of such substances. The message should be clear that alcohol and other drugs should not be used for recreation or experimentation. In fact, OSAP does not recommend sending messages that designated drivers are needed because that implies that people can become intoxicated or high as long as they do not operate a motor vehicle.

3. When Targeting Persons Under 21 Years of Age, Pregnant Women, Recovering Alcoholics, or Persons Taking Prescription or Nonprescription Drugs, Give a Clear Message of No Alcohol Use

Your message about alcohol use should be a nonuse message. Particularly for underaged students. A clear message of abstinence should be directed toward recovering alcoholics and pregnant women. Finally, individuals taking prescription drugs should be given a nonuse message because of the unpredictable risk association with combining the two substances.

Be sure your messages are socially, cognitively, and developmentally appropriate for the age of your publics. For example, children ages 9 to 13 tend to think concretely, while older youth think abstractly. Also, high-risk environments may adversely affect this progression.

4. State Clearly that Pregnant Women Must Not Use Any Drugs Without Consulting a Doctor

If you have pregnant teens in your audience, you need to advise them of consulting a doctor before taking any prescription or over-the-counter drug. Even common over-the-counter drugs like nasal sprays, aspirin, and antacids can have adverse effects on a fetus.

5. Material Targeting Youth Should Not Use Recovering Addicts or Alcoholics as Role Models

There are many problems with using recovering addicts or alcoholics as potential role models. Youth may perceive that their own use isn't as bad, or as frequent, as that of the recovering addict or alcoholic. They may perceive that the drugs they use aren't as harmful. Another problem is that, because the role model has "recovered," youth may get the message that they can use AODs because they might think they'll be cured if they go to a treatment program for 10 days and a couple of 2-day follow-ups.

6. Do Not Glamorize or Glorify the Use of Alcohol and Other Drugs

Alcohol and other drug use should never be portrayed as a positive experience, particularly a positive social experience. Youth should never see AOD use as a way to fit in and be popular or attractive to the crowd.

7. Do Not Include Illustrations or Dramatizations that Could Teach People Ways to Prepare, Obtain, or Ingest Illegal Drugs

Take care that your prevention messages don't illustrate how to use, prepare, sell, or buy drugs. Your messages should not be illustrated with anything that might teach a student how to work with or use drugs. Scenes of drug ingestion should not be shown, nor should actions that might stimulate drug use.

8. Do Not Blame the Victim

Youth should not be made to feel like they are to blame for their alcohol and other drug use problems. Their problem is one of addiction, which is an illness that can be treated. They should not be lambasted and have their character attacked because of such an illness. Rather, youth should be encouraged to get help with their addiction.

9. State That Abstinence is a Viable Choice

Abstinence should not be viewed as an ascetic practice. Self-deprivation should be left out of any prevention message. Instead, the message should show the positive aspects of abstinence. For example, if a student is suffering from insomnia, your message should be that there are alternative ways of dealing with it instead of turning to a tranquilizer or sleeping pill. (This is not to say that a medical professional would not recommend certain drugs in cases of illness.)

10. Check for Cultural and Ethnic Biases and Sensitivity

Materials should reflect cultural equity when a balance in the positive representation of diverse populations is acheived. All messages and materials should be free of cultural, ethnic, or sex bias and stereotyping. For example, materials should not contain demeaning labels or stereotypes of minorities. Also, materials should depict differences in customs as desirable.

Seven Unique Challenges You'll Face in Your Program

Your program will not be without challenges. In fact, seven such challenges may get you down now and again. By being familiar with the potential threats to your communications efforts, you may be able to stem damage early on.

1. Denial by Key Others

Denial by students and their families of family dysfunction and of alcohol and other drug use can be a barrier to successful communications. Another barrier is the denial by the school district staff that there is a problem or that they have a role in solving it.

2. Confidentiality Issues

Maintaining confidentiality is critical for AOD coordinators and others in the school district. Confidentiality is related to the release of information (anonymity is related to the collection of information). Students and their families often are concerned about the stigma associated with being labeled as part of a certain group or with receiving certain services. It is important to reassure students and families that informaton related to AOD issues cannot be divulged in a way that will identify them without their written consent.

3. Cultural Sensitivity and Competence

Your program may suffer from a lack of credible message sources and prevention materials for families from various cultural groups. AOD coordinators need to listen to and understand the needs of the cultural groups represented by their students. The challenge is to make sure that the message is relevant to the cultural group and the messenger is one who is accepted and respected by community members.

4. Ensuring Consistent Messages

Many people are involved in sending messages regarding AOD use to youth. They are not always communicating a consistent message. In the community, for example, billboards near school campuses advertise cigarettes and alcohol. Teachers may not have the same views regarding AOD use prevention and thus communicate inconsistent messages to students.

5. Potential to Embarrass the Superintendent and School Board

Given the sensitivity of the topic, you have the potential to embarrass the superintendent or school board or put the school district in a bad light. For example, your work in AOD use prevention may uncover student alcohol and other drug use on or off campus, gaps in services to youth, or unknowingly create a perception of blame on the part of the school system for the problem.

6. Different AOD Use Values

All of the school district staff may not share your values and beliefs about alcohol and other drugs. Some of this stems from denial of their own use problems, some from lack of awareness about the problem in general,and some from lack of information about the negative effects of AOD use. Regardless, you have the challenge of dealing with many persons who don't share your beliefs in your school and community.

7. Perceptions of the Role of AOD Use Prevention

AOD coordinators, unlike other more traditional academically oriented disciplines, work in a climate that does not always support their work. AOD use education and prevention are sometimes viewed as peripheral, not central, to the job of the school system.

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CHAPTER 6
COMMUNICATING LIKE A PRO

"Communicate like a pro." Sounds good, huh? But we know that you know that writing skills were not a big requirement for your job. And frankly, you're not sure you've got the time, interest, or patience to learn to "write like a pro." Okay, don't worry about it. By working together, we can ensure that you master enough tips to handle your own when communicating messages to your audiences. You can take some solace in the fact that the population is overrun with writers and editors. And good AOD coordinators are hard to find. So do what you do best and leave the serious writing and editing to the communication pros.

Two Overriding Rules of Good Communications

Here are two rules for you to memorize, paste on your wall, and take seriously every time you start a communications task.

Rule 1: Know What You're Going to Say Before You Say It

We could simply say, "Think." It's that simple. Before you sit down at the keyboard, think about three things:

(a) What is the message I'm trying to communicate?

(b) Who am I really trying to communicate this message to?

(c) What do I want the recipient to do after receiving my message?

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Rule 2: Don't Fudge on Rule One

We fudge all the time. And it's a big mistake. What tempts us to commit the cardinal sin of good communications is the simple fact we have a lot to say to a lot of different audiences and we only have so much time in which to do it. So we'll cram every fact and figure about AOD use into a single folder, throw in some helpful tips, perhaps a threat or two, and mail it off to parents, advisory committee members, the local media, and every student in the district. Then we sit back and wonder why nothing happens. We ask for reactions and we're left with the distinct impression that hardly anyone seems to have read our prose. Those who claim they did seem fuzzy about what it said. Friends swear they read it, but they tend to comment on the color or cover design. Nobody says anything about the content. At that point we have to conclude that we didn't communicate anything to anyone. That's the punishment for committing the cardinal sin of communication.

Some messages, of course, communicate equally well with everyone. The district's announcement that you've been hired to be the AOD coordinator would be as newsworthy to the students as it would to their parents and your colleagues. Your announcement about Red Ribbon Week, if you do such an event, could probably be shared equally well with a wide range of audiences.

But many of your messages are intended for much smaller audiences. And if you've read Chapter 3, you realize you will be communicating to even smaller publics among those audiences.

Some of what we're saying is just common sense. A memo to your advisory committee announcing a meeting wouldn't be something you'd share with students, parents, media, and your national counterparts. The memo was written for and about the committee and so that's all you will send it to. We call that "targeted communication." You might share a brochure that goes to students with your advisory committee. But the "target audience" is students; your advisory committee gets a copy because that's just good politics.

But let's say you receive in the mail a brochure produced by a fellow AOD coordinator downstate. And it's chock full of good advice about stemming alcohol use among high school athletes. You like it, call and get permission to replicate it, and now have to decide who to send it to.

If you're like the rest of us, your first thought is: "Boy, what a nifty brochure. Everybody is going to want a copy." And you might also conclude that distributing an attractive brochure to your colleagues, supervisor, and advisory committee isn't going to do you any harm either. As long as you're thinking about it, you could figure that if the brochure is good for the athletes, it's probably equally effective with all the kids and as long as you're now going to distribute it to the high schools, it might as well go to all the middle schools and oh what the heck, the elementary schools might as well receive copies, too. Before you know it, you've made hundreds of copies and sent them to everyone imaginable. Fact is, you've wasted your resources. Worse, you've communicated an irrelevant message to everyone who isn't involved with high school athletes. Many of these extraneous audience members are now forming the judgement that stuff out of your office isn't relevant to them. You'll be lucky if they even glance at the next flier they receive from your office.

Go back to Rule One. What is it you want to say? Who do you want to say it to? And what do you want them to do as a consequence?

Let's revisit our brochure from your colleague downstate. We said it concerns AOD use among high school athletes. But for the sake of illustration, let's say it wasn't written for them…it was written for their coaches and their parents. The message contains advice about do's and don'ts as it relates to "enabling" tendencies we all have. The intended outcome is for the parents and coaches to recognize their enabling behavior and its possible negative consequences on the AOD attitudes of the athletes.

So, the audience for your borrowed brochure are the coaches within your system, the coaches in the parks and recreation department, and if you can get a list, even the parent-coaches of soccer teams. You need to think about the best way of getting your message to this audience. You could simply mail the brochure to them, of course. That's easy. But if you have the time, you'll probably to be more effective face-to-face. Perhaps you could schedule yourself before a coaches' meeting. Not all of the coaches will be High-involvement Problem Facers, though. So you might want to start with some who are. From this meeting, you might identify some who are Low-involvement Problem Facers. Then you would change your approach and talk to them separately. Finally, by talking to the coaches you might be able to identify constraints that keep them from acting on the good advice in your brochure. That information will challenge you to find ways to remove the constraints or to lessen them.

Parents are the other audience and the numbers are such you probably will want to mail the brochure home with a cover letter. But that ought to get you thinking: Who's the best person to sign that letter? Not you, even though you wrote it. How about the superintendent? Particularly if the superintendent strongly identified with your district's athletic program. The individual coaches would be effective. Parents are apt to pay attention to a letter that comes to them from their child's high school basketball coach, for example.

What we're saying is to think about what you want to say, to whom, and what you want them to do as a consequence of the correspondence. Avoid "it makes me feel good" correspondence. Those are things you send out because it makes you feel good, even if it has no consequences for anyone else.

The good news is that you only have two rules to follow. The rest of what we have to offer are tips, including tips on where to go to find additional ones.

Here's our first tip. It's important enough to stand by itself.

> *Much of what passes for effective writing is driven by formulas. You learn the formula, you write like a pro.*

Six Questions That Constitute the "Writing Like a Pro" Formula for Success

The formula consists of six questions. Some or all of them will be pertinent to everything you write. Answer them, put them into some logical order, and you will be an effective communicator.

1. **Who?**

Everything you write about will have a "who." Let's say you are writing a memo to your staff about a critical site visit from your project officer. The who is your project officer. If you're writing a brochure about the ills of AOD use, the who ought to be the person you intend to read the brochure. The who could be the parent. Or the student. Or the counselor. Being clear about the who will greatly increase the effectiveness of your communication. Keep in mind, you're in trouble when the who is "everyone."

2. **What?**

The "what" is the nub of your story. In the examples above, the what is the site visit or the AOD use.

3. Where?

Now here's a critical one when writing about an event. "Where" tells your readers that the event is going to be held at a specific place and if they want to participate they ought to be there.

4. When?

If you're calling a meeting, let's say, you'll want to say "when" it's taking place.

5. Why?

Here's a tougher one. We all have a tendency, particularly when dealing with children, to just present them "truth" as we see it based on our years of experience and know-how. So we'll say, "Don't use alcohol and other drugs." Well, like it or not, a lot of your audience is asking, "Why?" Or you'll write a memo to your advisory committee calling a meeting, giving the time and place, but not the why. Big mistake.

6. How?

Here's another tough question. If you're advocating a point of view, and you intend for your audience to react in some way, you should explain "how." Parents know they should support your efforts at home. But giving them that message over and over again without explaining how isn't really effective.

Nine Terminology Tips for Communicating Prevention Messages

This list of terminology tips is adapted from the editorial guidelines provided by the Office for Substance Abuse Prevention (1989, March). These guidelines should undergird all of your prevention messages.

1. Try to be uniform in the terminology used in your district's AOD prevention communication messages and publications.

2. Use the term *alcohol-impaired driving* (not drunk driving). A person does not have to be drunk to be impaired.

3. Using the specific terms, such as *beer*, *wine*, and/or *distilled spirits*, is better than using the term liquor to mean any alcoholic beverage.

4. Use the terms *alcohol and other drug use* and/or *abuse* instead of substance use and/or abuse. Do not use the term "abuse" when the message is referring to anyone under 21 years. Most district programs aim to prevent use of alcohol and other drugs by youth.

5. Use the term *drugs,* not hard or soft drugs, since all illicit drugs are harmful.

6. Do not use the terms recreational use of drugs or responsible use; rather, say *drug use* since no drug use is recreational or responsible.

7. Use *crashes,* not accidents, when referring to an alcohol and other drug-related event since the term accident suggests the event could not have been avoided.

8. Use *mind-altering drugs,* not mood-altering drugs.

9. Do not use the term *workaholic* because it trivializes the alcohol-dependence problem.

Okay, here are some additional communication tips.

Thirteen Tips for Writing Like a Pro

1. Buy a Decent Writing Book

One of your first purchases should be a writing guide that covers the rules of grammar and punctuation, as well as style. You will turn back pages, write in the margin, and generally wear this book out. So perhaps you ought to buy it with your own money. It's a good investment for whatever you do in life.

Read the book and mark the important passages: You'll want to revisit them later. We'd suggest you consider *Style: Toward Clarity and Grace* and *The Elements of Style* (see appendix). For a guide that highlights punctuation and references, we recommend *The Chicago Manual of Style*. The academics among you might be more comfortable with the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association*. Fine. And former newspaper reporters in the group will want to use *The Associated Stylebook and Libel Manual*. No problem. The point is, you'll want a common reference so that your writing has some consistency to it. If you capitalize "Superintendent" standing alone in the sentence, then do so every time you use the word. Consistency is a writer's best friend.

And that's part of the reason you'll also want a good dictionary. Sure, buy a thesaurus if your budget allows it. We don't believe your writing tasks will require one, but it might look good on your reference shelf. Be a little choosy about which dictionary you buy. Many recently published dictionaries include colloquialisms, jargon, and alternative spellings that, for the most part, add little to your writing. One of the better dictionaries is *Webster's New World Dictionary of the American Language* (second edition).

2. Know Your Subject

Ever find yourself reading things two or three times in an effort to understand the authors' meaning? Chances are the authors didn't know what they meant either. A lot of what we call "fuzzy writing" simply reflects the authors' confusion over the subject matter. It's easily explained. Let's say you decide to do a news release about a recent AOD survey of your district. You're reading the consultant's report and it contains a lot of statistical data. It's all Greek to you, but you figure it's important and certainly impressive so you quote it just as the consultant wrote it. WRONG. If you don't understand it, why would you think your readers would? That goes for charts and graphs, too. We're all guilty of this sin. The consultant has a table that explains what the text says. At least that's what the author thinks. The table makes no sense to us, but it's attractive, certainly scholarly looking, so we throw it into our story. WRONG AGAIN. If you don't understand what you're saying, you have two choices. Develop an understanding or don't repeat it.

Keep in mind that as the AOD coordinator, you're the district's expert on the topic of substance use. People expect you to be an authority. They'll assume you communicate truth, squelch rumors, stomp out hearsay, and abhor falsehoods. To maintain their faith in you, you'll have to be a steady student. And that means you'll have to subscribe to journals, read reports, attend conferences, and generally stay abreast of your profession. Let's face it. The AOD field has its share of quacks and soothsayers. If you're going to be an effective communicator, you have to stay current and know when to endorse and when to question.

Build your messages on fact. Don't exaggerate the negative aspects of AOD use or attempt to instill a high level of fear. Scare tactics consistently have been shown to be ineffective. Your message will be ignored.

3. Write With the Reader Over Your Shoulder

We said it earlier, but it bears repeating. Know who you are writing to. If it's a high school student, figure one is looking over your shoulder as you write. That is, keep your readers in mind and always take care to clarify the questions they are likely to ask.

4. Write Appropriately

Seasoned writers have been known to stare at their computer screens for hours before ever getting the first word out. They're generally waiting for blood to bead on their foreheads, thus signifying that words are about to flow. Frequently what holds them up is the question of approach. Do I get folksy? Should I be serious? Am I writing as if it's a letter to a friend, or a memo of resignation to the boss? Do I want the reader to laugh, cry, jump off a bridge, or go running naked through the city streets? What approach do I take?

You undoubtedly will have the same problem. We did. When we first thought of this handbook, we were going to be deadly serious. And formal. By God, you'd learn the 10 steps to do this and the 6 steps to follow up and the 8 ways to correct yourself when you failed. Slam bam, one list after another, no frills and no mistakes. Then we called in a bunch of AOD coordinators and they said, "Lighten up. This job is tough enough without you three badgering us about our communication skills." So we took a different tack. We're a little chatty, certainly informal, and perhaps even a trifle bit irreverent. We know you are reading the book because you want to improve your communication skills. But we also realize you're not looking to beat the district's public information officer (PIO) out of a job.

So what do we have to say about approach? Well, it's different for everything you write. That's why we make so much of the point that you simply must have your audience members in mind when you sit down to write. And you must know what it is you intend to say to them. You also need to know what you expect them to do with the information you're sharing. Those three pieces of information generally will dictate an approach.

Let's say you're writing a piece to your colleagues about an upcoming visit from your school board. The outcome of the visit will determine whether or not you receive funding next year. This is serious stuff. So you ought to convey it accordingly. A formal tone is an appropriate approach.

But let's say you're writing to your colleagues about a new filmstrip you've received that might be appropriate for their classrooms. This is not a life or death matter. So be a little more chatty and informal if that's your natural tendency with your colleagues.

Keep in mind that when you're writing to people who know you, they generally will expect you to sound in print like you do in person. So if you're a formal person, write formally. If you're chatty, don't tighten up when you get in front of the computer.

When in doubt about an approach, go formal. Your friends will figure the superintendent is now editing your material. But you're a lot less likely to upset someone by being formal than being clever.

5. Use the Active Voice

Write in the active voice. Passive writing tends to be dry and boring. "The AOD plan was approved by the superintendent's office" is passive. Active voice would have it read: "The superintendent's office approved the AOD plan." In this way, the words conjure up an action, not a flashback, because they have more vigor.

6. Write Clearly

Clarity in writing is crucial. Convoluted sentences will lose a reader fast. Your message will fade into the grey block of text on the page as the reader stops trying to decipher it. Write clearly and state your points up front. Never hide your message in literary devices like metaphors, hyperbole, and similes.

7. Be Concise

Say only what needs to be said to convey the message to the intended audience. If you find yourself getting wordy, check back to Rule One. Chances are you're trying to convey too many messages to too many audiences at one time. If you're abiding by Rule One, then perhaps you're being wordy, evasive, clumsy, or committing any of a host of writing sins. Read the piece through and dump detailed descriptions, gratuitous embellishments, and above all, elaborations of the obvious.

8. Avoid Using Jargon or Fancy Words

If you're like us, fancy words are not your problem. Whenever we come up with a really fancy word we generally are not sure of its spelling. And that means a trip to the dictionary. Few fancy words are worth that much effort.

No, our bigger problem is jargon. Take "AOD" for instance. We use it throughout this book knowing fully well you know its meaning. Well, that's fine, given our keen sense of audience. But if we wanted to share this handy reference with the Chapter I coordinators, chances are they'd toss us aside after tripping over "AOD" for the third or fourth time. The message to you is be sure of your audience before slipping into the jargon of the trade. Avoid the jargon when communicating with most of your audiences. By the same token, one of the ways you can "personalize" your messages to your AOD colleagues is by using the jargon. Don't insult them by providing definitions for words they use every day.

9. Be Positive

Let's face it. A lot of negativity characterizes the AOD business. A lot of our messages begin with "Don't..." When possible, emphasize the positive. By the same token, write with certainty and commitment, leaving out any doubts, vagueness, and noncommittal prose. Your readers will hear your message more clearly and will be more convinced of your authority if you write convincingly and positively. Messages should focus on the availability of solutions rather than on the seriousness of the problem and should suggest positive incentives and encouragement to change.

10. Rewrite

Now here's a piece of advice you'll ignore. You heard it all through school: "Rewrite and rewrite and rewrite." Authors with more than a single book to their credit will swear they rewrite 10, 15 times.

We're not about to tell you any such thing. You don't have the time, say nothing about the inclination.

Why don't we strike a compromise? Write, read, and then rewrite once. Then read it again and edit a final draft. That's one write, one rewrite, and one edit.

11. Share a Draft With an Honest Friend

After you write and rewrite, share a copy of anything really important with an honest friend who will tell you things you'd just as soon not hear. Ask your trusted friend to read for the following two things.

(a) Read for Content

Ask your friend to tell you what your message is. If the feedback isn't consistent with your intent, you've got another rewrite ahead of you. As long as you're at it, ask your friend who the audience appears to be for the message. Again, if it differs from the one you intended, add or delete something.

(b) Read for Tone

You can do your own copy editing. And should. But your friend can tell you whether or not your "tone" is appropriate. That is, you don't want to use your "adult" tone when communicating with children. Or your "children" tone when communicating with parents. A friend also can tell you when you need to lighten up. If you have such honest friends, treat them well; they're a scarce commodity.

12. Play Editor

Run off a final draft of your copy. Take it with you out of your office and carry it down the hall. Find a chair someplace and pull out a pencil. Then read the copy one last time. Put yourself into the shoes of the intended audience. Clear your head and remember what you read in Chapter 3. You had something in mind when you wrote this piece. Does it come across? If you are communicating with a low-involvement public, are you making the case for its increased presence? If you are trying to reach a constrained public, are you making a convincing case about how the members of the public can free themselves? If you're talking to High-involvement Problem Facers, are you beating them over the head about a problem they already recognize?

Finally, if this copy were sent to you, would you read it? And if you did, would you know what to do with the information provided?

Assuming correct responses, you're ready to go to press. It's a great feeling; learn to enjoy it.

13. Don't Tolerate Errors

The communications business consists of two kinds of people. First, you have those who have typos and spelling errors in their copy, and figure everyone makes mistakes now and then. Then you have those who have typos and spelling errors in their copy, and go to pieces when they're discovered.

Mistakes do happen. But typos and misspelled words happen most often to the careless and disinterested. And everybody who reads your copy knows that. The more mistakes you tolerate, the less effective your communications. You have a tough job already: Don't make it that much tougher by allowing sloppiness to erode your credibility.

Ten Tips for Making a Successful Presentation

Up to now nearly everything we've said pertains to messages you put on paper and then communicate to audiences. A lot of what we said also pertains to the messages you communicate orally; e.g., speak clearly, know your message and audience, be concise. But that's not to say that speaking and writing are the same. They have some similarities, to be sure; but differences do exist.

Two Important Differences Between Speaking and Writing

(a) A written message is somewhat impersonal. The spoken word, on the other hand, carries the credibility of the speaker. An effective communicator is able to share enthusiasm, concern, tolerance, understanding, and empathy best when speaking.

(b) When speaking, the communicator can be flexible and alter the message to fit the response of the audience. This is a big advantage over the printed message.

A successful AOD coordinator, in other words, has to be able to communicate through writing and speaking. There's a lot we could say about public speaking, but the bookstores are full of "how to give a speech" books. Pick one in your price range and have a go at it. In the meantime, stick with us and we'll give you some general pointers.

Ten Presentation Tips

As an AOD coordinator, you'll be called on numerous times to deliver speeches and presentations. Much of the time you'll have a sufficient preparation period, although sometimes you'll be called at the last minute. Either way, remember that you're not only communicating your message and representing your district's AOD prevention program, you're representing yourself. And people will tend to judge you, your message, and your program pretty harshly based on your public appearances. It is crucial that you give the best possible presentation every time—whether you have months or days to prepare.

1. Know Your Audience

This is tougher than it seems at first blush. We assume you'll know if the audience is students, parents, teachers, or a community group. But do you know if the audience recognizes the problem? Do you know if it feels any involvement with the issue? Do the audience members operate under constraints? Do you understand the cultures of the audience?

The more you know about the audience, the better you can sharpen your message.

For example, low-involvement audiences are tough and you ought to approach the task knowing that fact. They will not see the relevancy of your message to their lives; consequently, they'll tune you out completely unless you are entertaining, brief, and nontechnical.

On the other hand, high-involvement audiences can tolerate longer, less dramatic, and more technical presentations. The reason, of course, is that they're seeking information. High-involvement audiences will not want to be entertained; they are seeking information, and they'll expect you to deliver the facts.

2. One Speech, One Point

Before you even begin writing your speech, ask yourself one question: What is the one, all-important point I want to make with this speech? Once you have it, test yourself: Reduce the entire message to a single sentence. Once you have a single thrust, you can weed out information that may be interesting, but doesn't support or illustrate your main point. We know, we know, you don't get many shots at this audience and you'll want to tell the audience everything you know. Bite your hand and then put it back on the keyboard. One all-important point is all you want.

3. Tell 'Em What You're Going to Tell 'Em

Remember that old saw: "Tell 'em what you're going to tell them; then tell 'em; and finally, tell 'em what you told them." Well, it still holds.

4. Never Have to Say You're Sorry

If your speech, for any reason, might be considered controversial, then by all means clear it in advance with your supervisor. Never assume you're "off the record," even with colleagues. Anything said at a public meeting can and will be used against you. So say what you will; just make sure that you can live with yourself when it hits the press or is passed around the teachers' lounge.

5. Practice, Practice, Practice, and Polish, Too

As a presenter, you're assuming the position of expert on your given topic. If you stumble through your unrehearsed presentation with "uh" and "um," you'll lose your credibility and your audience. Your presentation must be smooth-flowing. And that means don't read to your audience. The only way to perfect an easy, smooth delivery is to practice it. Read your presentation aloud several times before you do it in front of an audience. Read the words as you would speak them; if they don't sound natural, replace them. If the equipment is available, tape yourself and play it back.

If you have long-suffering friends, ask them to play audience for you. Ask your "test audience" to comment on your message, delivery, and style. Provide the audience with a list of questions to ask when you finish. First, did you sound convincing and authoritative? Second, was the length and tone of the presentation appropriate for the intended audience? Were you speaking clearly and enunciating your words? Were you using familiar words and explaining your points succinctly so that everyone in your audience could grasp your message?

6. Make Your Visual Aids Meaningful

Visual aids can often enhance and strengthen presentations. However, if the aids are too small, numerous, complex, or shabbily prepared, they will detract from your message. Whatever your visual tactic, practice your presentation using the aids so you can move from one aid to another without disrupting the flow of your presentation. It's a good idea to number overhead transparencies and slides in advance. During your presentation, if someone else operates your visual aids for you, give that person a cue card in advance so that you don't need to interrupt your speech with, "Next overhead, please."

For overhead transparencies, the most common form of visual aids, use a template that incorporates your school district or program name and logo. Use only high-quality transparencies that you have prepared in advance. You can design an overhead on your computer and photocopy it onto a vertical or horizontal transparency.

Keep in mind who sits in your audience. Low-involvement folks will need to be entertained if your message is to register.

Are your overheads entertaining? If not, redo them or drop them. Keep them for a presentation before high-involvement audience members; they'll appreciate anything you give them.

7. Speak Clearly and Slowly

Remember to speak clearly and slowly. You don't want your audience struggling to hear you or to decipher your words. If you've written your presentation using natural, everyday language and you've practiced it several times, you should have no problem with your delivery. Speak from your diaphragm and not your throat. Clear your lungs and throat well before your presentation. If you need water to keep your throat from cracking, ask for a pitcher and glass to be placed at the podium or point of presentation in advance.

8. Own the Room

It's easier to speak in a room you own. Said another way, get to the room early where you will speak, when it's empty and you can roam around in it. Stand before the microphone. Say something to the chairs. Walk around the stage. Check the equipment you'll use. Is there a marking pen with the tablet? A working bulb in the overhead? Will the overhead require you to walk away from your microphone? Do you care? Is there a lectern to hide behind? Do you care? Now's the time to make a list of issues you need to address before you go onstage.

9. Use It Again, Sam

Okay, you don't mind giving speeches. You're good at it. But you prefer to talk off the top of your head…no formal speeches. We know what you mean: You don't like to write.

Here's a suggestion for you. Frequently you will have to write a speech because it's on a new topic, it needs to be cleared in advance, or your host insists upon it. Don't fret. Figure any speech you write is a paper that doesn't need to be written. How much would it take to turn that speech into an article for a journal? How about an op-ed piece for the local newspaper? Perhaps an article in the city magazine?

If your speech is about hot news, write a press release to go along with it and mail it to your media outlets. You just might end up seeing yourself quoted in the press.

The speech also is a good pass-along-for-credit document. You know, the kind of thing you send to your superintendent, advisory committee, and project officer. You don't really expect them to read it, but you know they'll think you're on the job.

10. Allow Others to Say It for You

We said earlier that a savvy AOD coordinator might well want to spread some of the credit for good work among others, particularly less-than-enthusiastic supervisors. So why not write a speech or two for your superintendent to use? Give the superintendent two or three "pocket" speeches. One could be given in 10 minutes to an audience of laypersons who have an interest in the topic and wonder what the district is up to. This speech would end with the superintendent giving out your name and phone number. A second speech would be 15 minutes long. It would be designed for delivery to your district colleagues. Another might be for parents or children. The point is, figure out in advance what speeches the superintendent will likely be asked to give during the year. You can figure on a presentation to a downtown service club; a back-to-school presentation to parents; a welcome-to-the-start-of-a-new-school-year speech to faculty; and at least one presentation to a graduating class somewhere in the district. Each of these gives coordinators an opportunity to put a speech into their hands, words in their mouths, and perhaps a thought or two into their heads. After all, it's hard to ignore the wisdom of your own spoken words.

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CHAPTER 7
WORKING WITH THE MEDIA

Let's face it. Knowing *what* you want to say to *whom* is the most important part of the communication process. All too often, unfortunately, we talk about *how* we intend to communicate before we are sure of what we want to say or who it is we want to say it to. And then we're surprised when nothing happens as a consequence of our efforts.

Three Thoughts to Have Before Getting in Touch With the Media

Before you pick up the phone and call the local media or send a press release, run these three questions through your head:

1. Is This Really Important?

The media are in the business of transmitting news as they define it. Is your message newsworthy? Really newsworthy? Fresh? Has a local angle? Worth a picture or a film feature? If you're not sure, reconsider your decision to engage the media. You don't want to establish a reputation among the media as a trash peddler. One simple way to check your perception is to run the piece by your district's public information officer, if you have one. This seasoned veteran ought to know what's newsworthy.

2. Is This the Best Way to Get the Message Out?

Are you trying to communicate to an audience that might better be reached through a personal letter, flier, or your own newsletter? The mass media are a good way to reach a lot of people.

Yet the people you *really* want to reach might already be on your own mailing list. That being the case, use your own medium rather than rely on the public media to get the facts straight and to reach your intended publics.

3. How Concerned Am I About the Integrity of the Message?

Anything you provide to the media will go through an editing process. Stated positively, that means they'll improve your message and in the process make you appear to be smarter than you are. But an "editing" might also turn around and bite you. Your news release about your AOD program might accent the positive results it has obtained. But that doesn't ensure that the resulting story in the local newspaper will have a headline you'll want to paste over your computer. Controversy, startling statistics, and youthful indiscretion tend to be of greater interest than features that say, ho-hum, the school district is doing its job. If you are concerned about your message getting to a particular audience as you intended it, then transmit it yourself through your own medium.

Working Successfully With the Media

From time to time, you will want to publicize an event, share an outcome, or increase awareness of your program to a wide audience. You may recognize that the mass media aren't the most effective way of ensuring the accurate transmittal of your message to your publics. However, you might have volunteers on your steering committee and you know they'd be pleased to see their names in the paper. You might also have a superintendent who judges the worth of the district's programs by reading about their successes in the local press. Hey, that's cool. You wouldn't be the first person to write a press release for mass distribution although the audience is only one person or a small group of individuals who already know the story line.

Three Realizations That Undergird Your Media Relations

Keep in mind the following three realizations and you'll find less need for stress relievers.

1. The Reporter Doesn't Work for You

Now here's a simple piece of advice: Keep reminding yourself that the district doesn't pay the reporter's salary. That will help you understand why the reporter may not care two hoots about how hard you had to work to get your carefully worded message approved before it left the district. You know every word is sacred and can't be changed. But the reporter is unlikely to care about the superintendent's sensitivities, the board chair's pet project, or the principal's insistence that the story be told one way or no way. Clever AOD coordinators, by the way, will ensure that what they share with the press is in written form, if at all possible, so that a copy of what goes to the press also goes to key audiences. When the story appears in print, all twisted and confused, you'll at least be able to say to the offended parties that you just can't understand why the press would rewrite your release. We know, that's tacky and in the best of worlds the AOD coordinators will never have to cover their rears or run for cover. We're only suggesting what you might wish to do when you're not sure about the perfection of your world.

2. Realize That You Are Not the Only Source of News

All too often we are tempted to see ourselves as a font of wisdom on the topic of AOD use. As such, we assume the media will have the good sense to ask us when they have a question about alcohol and other drugs. Nothing could be more dangerous. A good reporter will want to hear from a variety of sources when working on an article. That will almost always include your superintendent or board chairman or both.

What you see as a local story may trigger a broader article in the mind of the local network affiliate. Consequently, the news director may call a half dozen of your colleagues from neighboring districts to see how their information compares to what you've provided in your release. A good reporter, looking for something to build a story around, is likely to ask folks to challenge your findings or conclusions.

This media habit of calling others about your story suggests three tips:

Tip 1 Be Careful What You Say

Remember, every release you write might be shared with other knowledgeable AOD experts. Will they draw the same conclusions you did? Do you really want to engage in a debate over the merits of your approach in the local press? Are you sure your facts will be favorable when compared to the results obtained by your neighboring districts?

Tip 2 Don't Surprise Your Supervisors

Assume anything you send the media will result in a telephone call to your superintendent and/or board members. Will they know what the reporter is talking about? Do they have the necessary information to support your interpretation? We know, frequently you'll want to get something in the paper on a particular day. Perhaps the television crew is on the way over. Speed seems to be of essence. Well, you can try that line on your superintendent when the latter is quoted in the paper as saying, "No comment." Or your board chairman denies the figures you released about the amount of AOD use in your schools. Frankly, speed is the reporter's problem. Not yours. Your problem is to ensure that you have your bases covered before you send something off to the media. In the event the media get to you first, make sure you get to your critical supervisors before they can expand on it. Consequently, a smart AOD coordinator will make sure that any message worthy of generating a story probably will involve others in the district.

Tip 3 Don't Surprise Anyone Critical to Your Success

Some people, as Tip 2 suggested, should never learn second-hand about your activities. But there's a larger cast of characters that we call elsewhere friendly, supportive High-involvement Problem Facers among your key publics. They may include your advisory committees, your project officer, the chair of your parents' group, or even your student leaders. Even if they never do get a call from a reporter, these ace supporters of yours will appreciate the fact you thought of them in advance. Think of it this way: How can people be High-involvement Problem Facers if they have to read the local paper to learn what you're up to? Said a little differently, how could you expect them to be "friendly and supportive" High-involvement Problem Facers if you don't consider them important enough to keep them abreast of your activities?

3. Realize That Some News Is More Newsworthy Than Other News

If you have what the media call "hard news," treat it as such. Everything else is soft, fuzzy news and deserves to be treated differently.

Hard news is the kind of thing that grabs headlines. Unfortunately, a lot of hard news is bad news. "Police Bust Local

Students" is hard news. So is "Raid on School Lockers Reveals Large Drug Cache."

From time to time AOD coordinators will have positive hard news. And when they do, they ought to ensure it gets wide coverage. An example of such news is a drug survey that shows a steep drop in local student use of alcohol and other drugs.

Being enthusiastic about your AOD program, you tend to think a lot of things fit into the positive hard-news category. Alas, the reporters will frequently disagree. For that reason, they might not give much play to your release announcing "Red Ribbon Week" or the picture of your superintendent wearing a "Do Not Smoke" button. Hard news is in the eye of the beholder. The trick for AOD coordinators is to learn how to identify it as the media does.

Be honest in your appraisal of the news value of your releases. And remember, the best way to communicate with your key audiences is through your own mediums. You can treat anything you want as hard news when you run it in your own newsletter. So if superintendents like pictures of them wearing buttons, give them front-page treatment in your newsletter. Share the newsletter with your public information officer for similar treatment in district fliers. By the same token, you can mail your release about Red Ribbon Week directly to your advisory committee and probably coax the high school newspapers to run it.

Five Ways to Get Your Less-than-hot News Published

Not every item you want published or shown on the nightly television news is newsworthy, even by your definition. But from time to time your program could sure use the publicity, couldn't it? Don't be bashful about it: The media are full of puff pieces and one, every once in awhile, ought to be yours.

A puff piece normally is a light feature or even a simple announcement. It may be a feature story you talked the district's public information officer into writing about a nifty new AOD approach being attempted in one of your high schools. It may be a listing of your new advisory committee members. Or, heaven forbid, it may even be an announcement that you attended a state AOD coordinators' meeting. We're not talking about a press conference here. We're not even suggesting a media kit. We're talking about the little news stories that make you happy when they appear and help to fill your scrapbook.

Here's five tips for getting your soft news published.

1. Remember Grocery Day

Thursday is the day most local newspapers run the grocery ads. That means on Thursday the newspaper contains more pages than usual. And that means there's more room for your feature, human interest photograph, or announcement. Less-than-breaking-news items submitted to the newspaper before Wednesday afternoon, in other words, have a better than average chance of appearing on Thursday. By the same token, Saturday is usually a small newspaper day. Don't figure on a Friday release getting much play until Sunday, when again the news hole is larger and in need of fill.

2. Make One or More Media Friends

Your chances of getting material into print or on the air go up dramatically if you are on a first-name basis with a local reporter or two. Ask your district's public information officer who covers education for the various media. Find out who's friendly. (Be prepared, though, for the fact the local PIO might not be willing to "share" a media contact with you. It's a dog-eat-dog world out there in the world of media relations and most PIOs will be reluctant to share a good contact with someone who just might foul the nest for them. Don't take it personally; you'll undoubtedly do the same when some new kid on the block asks you for your list of media pushovers.)

Hand deliver your releases directly to your friendly media contacts. Don't appear pushy. And don't oversell. The reporter will know how to evaluate the worth of your copy; don't make a fool of yourself trying to sell a puff piece as hard news. Tell the reporters that you would certainly appreciate it if they could find space to run your item. Point out to them if there's any timeliness to the article. Otherwise, assure them that the item could wait until Thursday or Sunday's editions.

If your first effort to go through the reporters who cover the education beat doesn't work, try approaching the city desk editor at the newspaper or the news directors at the local television and radio stations. They may send you back to the education reporters, but at least you'll come referred.

Remember, the more personal interest you take in the item, the more interest the media will take in it. Something that's mailed to them cold, in news release form that suggests everybody else has the same story, isn't likely to get much attention.

By the way, friendship is a two-way street. Your media contacts won't hesitate to call you when they're onto an AOD story. Be prepared to show them the same courtesy they showed you.

3. Try an Around-about Way of Getting the Word Out

Ask your new-found reporters what is the best way to get your news items published or shown. And then follow their advice. Newspapers frequently run club notes or meeting notices. At the very least, you can get your AOD program mentioned by sending in a note that you'll be speaking at a club meeting or that your advisory committee is going to meet. Keep in mind, though, that by announcing these meetings you are essentially opening them to the public. And that includes the press. Be prepared to be quoted on anything you say in a public meeting.

4. Prepare a Public Service Announcement

Your local radio and television stations generally accept public service announcements. Call them to find out what format they prefer. Most will be glad to accept written script; others will claim you increase your chances of usage if you provide film or tape. You need to decide how much you want to invest in a message that stands a good chance of being broadcast when most of your audiences are asleep, at work, or at school.

5. Watch for a Local Connection

Television stations feature network news; newspapers run Associated Press wire stories. Both are intended to bring to the local folks news from outside the community. From time to time these outside sources of news will talk about your favorite topic, the AOD problem. When a station runs a series on the nation's drug problem, for example, call and suggest they do a local tie-in with your district's efforts. If the newspaper is doing a series on crack babies, call the editor and suggest the paper might want to run a feature on what the district is doing to alert children to the problem.

Meet the Press at the Door

When peddling soft news, the AOD coordinator frequently has to go to the media to increase the likelihood of its use. When dealing with hard news, particularly bad news, the media will come to the coordinator. And without question, a news story will result.

As stated, not all hard news is bad. Some is actually good and when it is, the AOD coordinator can take a bow and thank divine providence for the good fortune of having landed such an enviable job.

Three Ways to Present Good, Hard News

Let's say the district just received the results of a statewide survey that shows its AOD use dropped 15% during the past year. Or let's say the entire faculty of the district came together to declare that they'll no longer use alcohol or other drugs in their personal lives in hopes of setting a good example to the students. Perhaps the district has just received a million-dollar federal grant to help with its AOD program. Any of these would qualify as a hard-news item. Here are your alternatives.

1. Write a Press Release and/or Produce Audio and Film

The easiest thing to do is to write a press release, clear it with everyone involved, and mail it to the media, newspapers, radio, and television. Then sit back to see if anyone bites. The advantages to this approach is that it's fast, cheap, and ensures you maximum control over content. If the news is really "hot," you can expect the press to follow up with calls or visits. If the news is so-so, or if you hit the press on a bad news day, your release may not get used or, if it does, it may fall onto the obit page and be lost. Without film, television stations are not likely to make much of a play of a written release. Consequently, they're likely to either come out with a camera crew or ignore the release.

2. Hold a Press Conference

If your news is hot, you might as well assume that the media will come calling after receiving your release. If that's the case, then it may be to your advantage to stage a media event and have it all done with at one time. If you go this route, write a brief release—all the pertinent facts—and invite the media to a press conference. Ask your district's public information officer for assistance. Chances are these pros will know where in the district to hold the event that disrupts the fewest people, creates a minimum of hassle, and offers the media what they need for background. With any luck, your district's PIO will take responsibility for this event. In that case, you'll simply provide backup and the pertinent information. Assume that the superintendent will deliver the news; but check first because you may have to go before the cameras. If that's the case you'll want to do a little rehearsing on your own. The PIO will know how to prepare a press kit, arrange the seating, stage the lights, and generally ensure a successful event.

If you get stuck with the task, start by taking a deep breath. And then do the following.

Tip 1 Brief the Superintendent

Make sure your superintendent knows the content of whatever is the subject of the press conference. Assume the superintendent will field most of the questions. Prepare anyone else you two can think of who might also be critical to the success of the press conference.

Tip 2 Ask the Media What They Need

Don't be bashful. Call the media a day or so before the scheduled event and ask them what their needs are (e.g., electrical outlets, lights, props, spokespersons). To the extent of your ability, and common sense, try to satisfy their needs.

Tip 3 Hide the Children

In the best of all worlds, you wouldn't hold a press conference at a school site. But if a school plays a pivotal role in your news, then you may have to go on site. Alert the principal and assign the building staff the responsibility for preparing for the press visit. This preparation ought to include location, timing (not when classes break, for goodness sake), participation, and staff involvement.

Tip 4 Have It in Writing

Have whatever you plan to say on paper in the form of a release. You greatly increase the likelihood of accurate quotations when they're printed on paper.

Tip 5 Serve Coffee and Soft Drinks

The media appreciate the courtesy and so will the district staff.

3. Give an Exclusive

As a rule of thumb, never give a reporter an exclusive. If you have hard news to present to the entire community, then by all means share it equally with all of the media. Play favorites with your reporters and you're asking for trouble. It's a competitive world out there and nobody appreciates being left out, particularly when the news source is a tax-supported institution.

On the other hand, respect an enterprising reporter who comes to you with a story idea. If you agree to assist in collecting information and/or staging an event for the sake of the story, honor the reporters' "exclusive" and don't tip off their competitors. However, once the story plays, then assume other media will follow up with a twist on the story of their own. Be prepared to help them satisfy their audiences.

Two Ways to Present Bad News

From time to time the district will be hit with someone's definition of bad news. That generally means news that the superintendent or board define as "bad." Keep in mind that bad news often is true and newsworthy. Therefore, it's going to get out. And there's two ways that can happen.

1. The One Best Way to Handle Bad News

Be prepared for it. Assume all the worst-case scenarios that could happen and prepare a plan of action for each. Examples might include the following.

- The police raid the high school in search of drugs. The press show up with them.
- An elementary school principal confiscates drug packets from a bunch of fourth graders during recess.
- A teacher admits to smoking marijuana at his home with a group of students and says he sees nothing wrong with it.
- The state AOD survey shows your district's overall drug usage is down, but alcohol consumption way up.
- Police announce that they've broken up a drug ring working out of one of your middle schools.
- Your superintendent is picked up DUI on the way home from an appearance before your AOD advisory committee meeting.

The list could go on and on. Surely you have some nominees of your own, maybe drawn from your district's own experiences.

2. The One Worst Way to Handle Bad News

What's the worst way to handle bad news? To not be prepared. To stand back and allow the media to draw their own conclusions. To not answer your phone and to respond to every press inquiry with a terse, "No comment."

The point is, bad news happens. When it does, the media will be by. And the public will receive a story about the event, and not necessarily with the slant that you or your superintendent would prefer. The media will give you an opportunity to comment, to present your side of the story. Be prepared with one. Then be prepared to carry your own expanded version of the story to your key audiences, probably through a memorandum from the superintendent.

An AOD Coordinator's Three Responsibilities When Confronting Bad News

A lot could be said about how a school district prepares to deal with bad news. But this is an AOD coordinators' handbook so we'll concern ourselves with your role and responsibility.

(a) Establish Who's the Official Spokesperson

Normally the superintendent is the district's official spokesperson. That being the case, your role is to be a resource. It's important to establish up front that you are not the district's spokesperson: If a call comes to you from the media, be polite, but firm, and reroute it to the superintendent's office. If the reporters say they have already talked to the superintendent and want your version, politely but firmly say you have nothing to add to the superintendent's statement. Say it even if you do.

(b) Be Helpful to the Official Spokesperson

If the bad news involves student AOD use, you can probably be of assistance to the official spokesperson. If you have facts that the spokesperson can use to cushion bad news or to put it into context, by all means you should share it. Put it in writing, if at all possible, so that the media can reference it.

(c) Get in Touch With Your Critical Audiences

As soon as possible, contact the Problem Facers among your key audiences. They need to hear, and hear fast, your side of the story. Assume they're going to get another version from the media. Call them and follow up with a printed statement. It may be the same statement you helped prepare for your superintendent's presentation to the media. Or it may be something special you put together that reassures them that the bad news won't disrupt your AOD program efforts or tells them actions that your program staff are taking in response to the situation.

Whatever you do, don't assume that your key audiences have missed the bad news or are ignoring it. Never keep your friends in the dark. Others will come to them to clarify, deny, or confirm the bad news. Give your friends your side of the story so they can do their communication job on your behalf. Remember, your friends are sources of information about your program. They will communicate something; do yourself a favor and make sure that something is something you wrote.

Life Is Full of Trade-offs

You won't be alone if you express outrage at the media's insensitivity toward AOD in their advertisements and programming. From time to time you'll want to go on a crusade to eliminate these potentially harmful images and messages. Your choice. The media tend to regard crusaders as zealots.

And zealots are seldom thought of as professionals. You can approach the media as a professional educator with a message. Or you can storm their doors with a list of demands. What's difficult is to do both effectively.

Frankly, both approaches have something going for them. A zealot against AOD use is in the same category as a mother against drunk driving. The media may find them annoying, but their messages frequently get communicated. In fact, a case can be made that the number of messages they get the media to pass on is in direct proportion to the amount of energy they expend bugging news directors and news editors.

Here's a simple rule of thumb to guide your behavior. Remember what we said about audiences. Figure out which of the publics best defines your local news editors and news directors. If they recognize the problem, give them your professional treatment. They'll want to work with you to convey your messages.

On the other hand, if they don't see the problem, then allow yourself to go zealot. Remember: Low-involvement Routiners or Low-involvement Fatalists are not likely to process your message. That's to say you can swamp a routiner or fatalist reporter or editor with messages and they're not likely to have any impact. So change tactics. You've got to go to some extremes if you intend to get their attention. Bring your whole advisory committee to the newspaper and demand a meeting with the editor. Organize a picket line in front of the television station. Have parents write letters to the media. All of these attention-getting devices will help you increase the involvement of your gatekeepers in the media to the AOD problem. The more they become involved with you, the greater the likelihood they will recognize the problem. And once you have problem recognition and involvement, you probably will have an ally in your struggle to deliver the AOD message to your publics.

Then, with the media now focused on your issue, you can go back to being professional again.

STAGES OF ADDICTION

CHAPTER 8

SELECTING TOOLS FOR EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATIONS

Some things lend themselves to lists. This chapter features a whole variety of such things. Run through them quickly and remember where you saw what: You might want to return at some later date.

Twelve Effective Written Communications Tools

Every professional has a toolbox. An effective communicator's includes the following.

1. Newsletters

Newsletters give specialized information to a select audience on a regular basis. Newsletters have short articles written in an informal style. Placing articles in the newsletters of various community organizations will stimulate interest among their members. Newsletters also are an effective way to reach parents of school district students. Articles should specify ways that community members can support the school district's alcohol and other drug use prevention program and identify volunteer opportunities for those interested in more active involvement.

Eleven Tips for Effective Newsletters

(a) People read newsletters if they feel involved with the issues covered. Send your newsletter to those who recognize the AOD problem and feel a personal sense of involvement. Sending the newsletter to people who don't recognize the problem or who are uninvolved with it is a waste of your resources.

(b) Select a good name for your newsletter. Don't call it "newsletter."

(c) If you have the money and time, do a newsletter at least six times a year. Short ones are preferable to long ones, particularly if going short means you can go with more. Quarterly newsletters come so infrequently people forget to expect them.

(d) Pay a graphic designer to develop your masthead and first issue. Keep it simple. You will probably want to do subsequent issues on a computer. If you can't afford a graphic designer, get together with your art teachers and see what they can come up with for you.

(e) Write your copy in a friendly, chatty style. You're not communicating with strangers. If you are, then your mailing list is too large.

(f) The format of your newsletter should be clean and uncluttered, with headings to make it easier for the reader to identify articles of interest.

(g) Headlines should relate to the story, have a verb, use present tense, and tell as much on your story as possible.

(h) Your newsletter can be made more interesting with simple graphics or pictures.

(i) Use humor sparingly—what is humorous to you may not be to someone else.

(j) Always proofread your newsletter carefully, paying particular attention to typographical or grammatical errors and tone. Then have someone else proofread it. Frequently we are in such a rush to get a newsletter out that we allow a few errors to slip through. Keep in mind nobody will remember when a newsletter was received; everybody, though, will remember if it contained errors.

(k) Avoid sexist language and stereotypes based on gender, race, age, ethnic background, physical ability, or sexual preference.

2. News/Press Releases

At times you will want to let the media know about an event or the results of a district student substance use survey. To do this you need to write a press release.

Eight Steps to Develop Your Press Release

1. At the right top of the release, indicate "For Immediate Release" and the mailing date, or indicate "For Release: Sept. 1, 19XX."
2. At the left top of the release, indicate a contact name and telephone number so the reporter can obtain additional information if needed.
3. Include a one- or two-line "headline" that says what the release is about.
4. The body of the release should be typed, double-spaced with wide margins.

5. The text should quickly answer the following key questions: who, what, when, where, why, and how.
6. If possible, give at least one direct quote by a credible spokesperson.
7. If you include a photograph with the release, add a caption to the back of the photo along with a date and photograph credit.
8. If announcing an event, the news release should be in the hands of the media at least 48 hours in advance.

3. Clippings

As you read through other publications, newspapers, books, and magazines, clip articles that say what you would like to say if you had the time to write it. These articles can be the source of quotes for your presentations or they can be mailed to some of your key audiences.

4. Press Kits

A press kit is what you give the media when they come by for a press conference or special event. It's your opportunity to give the media more information then they're likely to think of asking about. The kit might include background information about the AOD problem (to be more effective, include local statistics), information about how your district is responding to the prevention challenge, and a sample press release. It ought to include information about the district, too. Don't hesitate to get these press kits into the hands of the media before they arrive at the district for a news conference. By the way, as long as you're going to all the trouble to prepare the press kits, share copies with members of your key publics (e.g., your advisory committee, project officer, and perhaps important individuals within the district itself).

5. Public Service Announcements

Public service announcements (PSAs) are short—10 to 60 seconds—radio or TV announcements produced by nonprofit or government agencies that promote programs, services, activities, or issues of community interest. The media donate the broadcast air time for these PSAs; however, competition for public service time is intense. Keep in mind that PSAs are limited in their impact.

Eighteen Guidelines for PSA Message Development[1]

1. Keep messages short and simple; just one or two key points (a rule of thumb is 20 words for every 10 seconds, allowing time for pauses).
2. Repeat the message as many times as possible.
3. Identify the main issue in the first 10 seconds in an attention-getting way.
4. Summarize the main point at the close.
5. Superimpose your main point on the screen to reinforce the verbal message.
6. Recommend performing specific behaviors.
7. Demonstrate the health problem, behavior, or skills (if appropriate).
8. Provide new, accurate, and complete information.
9. Use a slogan, theme, music, or sound effects to aid recall.
10. Be sure that the message presenter is seen as a credible source of information, whether authority figure, target audience member, or celebrity.
11. Use only a few characters.

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[1] This list was adapted from a National Institutes of Health document (1989).

12. Select a testimonial, demonstration, or slice-of-life format.
13. Present the facts in a straightforward manner.
14. Use positive rather than negative appeals.
15. Emphasize the solution as well as the problem.
16. Use humor, if appropriate, but pretest to be sure it does not offend the intended audience.
17. Be sure your message is relevant (in language and style) to your target audience.
18. If the action is to call or write, show the phone number or address on the screen for at least 5 seconds.

6. Overhead Transparencies

Overhead transparencies are helpful in making presentations to the PTA, school board, community groups, and so forth. As a rule of thumb, transparencies are useful when the group is between 10-75 persons (with smaller groups, use butcher paper and with larger groups use slides or video presentations). When preparing overhead transparencies, remember to be brief, concise, and avoid jargon. Do not put more than seven lines on any one transparency. And make sure your typeface is large and readable from anywhere in the room. Simple charts and graphs also work well as overheads.

7. Annual Reports

It isn't likely you will have the resources to do a fancy annual report. And if you had the resources, spending it on a fancy annual report might be counterproductive…someone is sure to wonder why the district has all kinds of money to do glossy printing, but not enough to rid the schools of drugs. Or something to that effect. However, you might well have to do an annual report to your funding source. And it probably will be machine reproduced and bound with a staple in the upper right-hand corner. Assuming you did a good job with the content, you ought to share that document with some of your key publics (e.g., advisory committee, superintendent, and other key staff within the district).

8. Brochures and Booklets

Brochures are usually single sheets folded to create more than one page of information. Booklets are small books. Both are standard tools of the trade for getting information out in an attractive, readable format to lots of people.

9. Memorandums

One effective way to reach many of your key audiences is through a memorandum. Put as much effort into them as you do your brochures. Keep in mind, too, that they'll get passed around, so watch what you say to whom.

10. Fact Sheets

A fact sheet is just what it says it is. Generally fact sheets accompany something else. For example, you might give a press release to the media and include a fact sheet that has individual notes about the district's size, composition, number of teachers, etc. Or you may have around the office fact sheets that explain what your program is and what it intends to accomplish. Then when people drop by and ask, "Just what is it you do exactly?" you can hand them a fact sheet and send them on their way.

11. Handbooks and Workbooks

Handbooks, like this one, are documents that provide detailed information and resources related to a particular topic. Most handbooks include samples and materials that the audience can use to develop their own stuff. Workbooks contain printed material designed for interactive learning where the audience, following directions, writes in responses.

12. Bumper Stickers, Baubles, and Buttons

Many districts spend money to purchase and distribute items that convey AOD messages. Never underestimate the items' popularity or overestimate their effectiveness. The trick to using such devices is to find someone else to pay for them. Here's a good place to take advantage of the service club's request for information on how it can help you and your program. Items they might purchase on your behalf include: posters, buttons, bumper stickers, rulers, pencils, book covers, T-shirts, banners, student wallet cards, bulletin boards, displays, key chains, bookmarks, milk cartons, athletic uniforms, provisional driver's permits, and student ID cards.

Six Ways to Deliver a Message

Once you have a press release ready to go out, you have to decide where to send it. Here's six considerations.

1. Local Television Stations

Television stations offer several options for getting prevention messages communicated. News reporters are looking for a story—frequently a local angle to a national story. Interviews, talk shows, or panel discussions can give you an opportunity to discuss or debate issues. Some television stations even take editorial and commentary positions on AOD issues. Different stations use different titles to describe what various people do around the place. If you have a news story, start out asking for the news director. If it's a public service announcement, ask for the community affairs director or the public service director. If you want the station to air an editorial on your behalf, call the switchboard and ask for a appointment with the person who delivers the on-air editorials.

2. Local Radio Stations

There's radio and then there's radio. Some are all news and would love to receive your releases. Others are all music and wouldn't know what to do with your release. Know your market. If you are pushing public service announcements to children, try to go with the stations kids listen to. If you want to enrage the community or look for volunteers, seek the easy-listening or all-news stations. Consider getting on a call-in radio program. Consider it carefully, though; you don't control the questions and not everyone listening may like your responses.

3. Local Newspapers

All newspapers are departmentalized so your information must be directed to a certain reporter or area. Newspapers, more than TV, will take editorial positions on issues and their editors are willing to meet to discuss them. There also is a forum for your views in the "letters to the editor" section. Weekly newspapers serve their communities and are always looking for features with a local angle. Don't hesitate to ask newspaper marketing department staff to donate ad space to announce local AOD prevention events and solicit community involvement. (If the newspaper's policy prohibits donating ad space, consider asking a service club or business to donate the cost of the ad.)

4. Trade and Business Publications

Another way to get your message in print is to publish it in trade and business publications. For example, the local chamber of commerce generally has a newsletter that goes to the community's business elite. Talk to the editor about what kind of story makes sense for the chamber's readers. The social and professional clubs (Elks, Lions, Rotary, etc.) also frequently publish a local newsletter. Again, don't figure them to run your copy without a conversation with the editor in advance. Finally, your larger local businesses and corporations publish employee newsletters. Same idea: Talk to the editor first to develop together an idea for an article or feature.

5. Local Service Clubs

Service clubs tend to be heavily involved in the enrichment of community life through service. As such, these civic groups often support activities to prevent alcohol and other drug use. Find time to have a face-to-face meeting with the local officers of as many of these groups as possible. They have money, personpower, and good links to the community's powerbase.

6. Other Community Outlets

Other community channels that can serve as vehicles for your prevention messages include public libraries, resource centers, city/county parks and recreation departments, youth recreation agencies and centers, community centers, housing projects, social service agencies, health care clinics, laundromats, movie theaters, shelters, and religious settings. You are limited only by your imagination.

Five Effective School-based Communications Outlets

1. PTA Meetings

Your local PTA is a place to begin good communications with parents of students. One strategy is to conduct an AOD awareness session during one of the PTA meetings. This will give parents an opportunity to discuss the issue, hear all about the district's prevention program, and begin to identify ways that they can help provide consistent messages to their children.

2. Superintendents' Normal Communications

Superintendents are asked to give a lot of welcomings, convocations, and graduation speeches. AOD coordinators ought to have 3-minute, 5-minute, and 15-minute speeches in their file for such events. Assuming superintendents are strong advocates of their district's AOD efforts, they should: stock their offices with parent brochures that can be tucked into outgoing mail, put bumper stickers on their cars, and hang posters in their offices. Superintendents, in other words, communicate in a lot of ways. And in the process, aware of it or not, they are telling people the extent to which they are concerned about the AOD problem.

3. Student Newspapers

Student newspapers can be an effective mechanism for delivering AOD prevention messages to students. But don't assume that once something appears in the paper it has been communicated. Many high school papers are under the control of the school administration and the students know it. Knowing it, they tend to scan but not retain articles in the "official" publication. At best, you can assume that members of your student audience who recognize the AOD problem and have made a decision to involve themselves in it will seek reinforcing messages that you get published in the paper. Those students you really want to reach, on the other hand, are not likely to process and remember your printed messages in the student paper.

4. Districts' Newsletter

The ability of your communications in the district newsletter to convey your message is related in part to how the readership of the newsletter responds to the publication. If it's seen as "their" publication, they'll read it. If it's just a superintendent's message board, they'll scan it, but ignore anything that doesn't have direct relevance for them. If you want to reach parents, in other words, you're better off going directly to them. Supplement your personal messages with something in the newsletter that reinforces your point of view. By all means, treat the district newsletter as you would the local newspapers: Send it your releases and charm the editor into running them.

5. Advisory Committees

Your advisory committee ought to be seen as one of your more effective communications mediums. Assuming you selected the members well, they have good ties to the community and its power structure. Consequently, they have access to key publics. Furthermore, because of their involvement with you, they have high credibility as "experts." Your job, then, is to provide them with the information they need to be effective communicators. That includes providing them with clues about who they should be targeting; explaining how to interact with active, aware, latent, and nonpublics; and asking them to share with you what they heard back from these key publics.

Eleven Effective AOD Prevention And/or Awareness Events[2]

1. Awareness and Information Campaigns

Clubs, student councils, teachers, or community groups can sponsor awareness campaigns. Red Ribbon Week is an example of a campaign that can be communitywide.

2. After-school Programs

These programs provide adult-supervised after-school programs designed to meet the needs of the students and families in the neighborhoods surrounding the school. Activities might include education, computer instruction, entertainment and play, crafts, or field trips.

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[2] This section was adapted from a document on alternative activities for school-based prevention (Bickel, 1989).

3. Peer Helper Programs

Peer programs create opportunities for students to help other students. They have been shown to be extremely effective in combating adolescent health-risking behaviors. Among other activities, students can teach refusal skills to other students, be special friends, assist in cofacilitating intervention education and support groups, and staff teenage hotlines.

4. Teen Conferences and Institutes

The purpose of teen conferences, retreats, and institutes is to empower teens to take action against the alcohol and other drug problems in their neighborhoods and communities. These events are planned, organized, and run by students with adults acting as advisors.

5. Support Groups

The purpose of support groups is to help students mobilize their personal and social resources to meet their needs. Student groups are for support, not therapy. A group setting can facilitate attempts to help students increase their knowledge about their own behavior patterns or how their lives are affected by the behavior of others. Groups can consist of children of alcoholics or concerned person groups, Alateen, families in change groups, eating problem groups, self-esteem groups, and school adjustment groups.

6. Performing Arts Groups

Live music or theater groups can be used as a medium to present drug-free and other messages to students It is an excellent strategy for mixing cultural groups and for developing links between persons with divergent backgrounds. Students can combine theater, dance, and music to write and act scripts dealing with feelings or life experiences, anger, depression, fear, loneliness, pressure, friendship, dating, divorce, stress, and so forth.

7. Role Model and Mentor Programs

As assistants, trainees, or observers of community role models, students learn how people live drug-free lives and, at the same time, acquire skills and confidence. Successful adults, such as business owners, professionals, politicians, police officers, barbers, musicians, firemen, painters, and so forth, model healthy life styles.

8. Alcohol and other Drug-free Events for Students

The purpose of this strategy is to sponsor activities that are conducted in an alcohol and other drug-free atmosphere. Events such as graduation night, prom night, concerts, dances, and other activities can be highlighted as alcohol and other drug-free events. It is essential that students be involved in the design and planning of these events.

9. Prevention Clubs

Prevention clubs bring together students who are committed to not using alcohol and other drugs. Through a variety of educational, recreational, and service activities, these clubs can strengthen and reinforce a student's determination to live drug-free. One of the most widely implemented clubs in school districts across the country is the "Just Say No" Club. Organizations or larger businesses in the community frequently sponsor or adopt clubs. Prevention clubs can be a vehicle for a wide range of other prevention activities.

10. Service Clubs

Service clubs provide students with opportunities to influence their schools and communities and in the process to build their interpersonal skills, self-esteem, and sense of power and control. While service activities may seem to have little relationship to alcohol and other drug-free events, participation in the development of these activities is being used increasingly in recovery programs and in community-based prevention strategies.

11. Environmental Change Programs

This strategy is designed to change the social and cultural context in which students live, not specifically to change the student. The goals of environmental change programs are to change the way society promotes alcohol and other drug use through advertising and to change the practices and laws that promote use or create health and safety risks. Students can acquire skills, while at the same time create change in their neighborhoods. This strategy works only with community support. Students can conduct surveys around schools for billboard messages about tobacco and alcohol, calculate how many students they impact, how many messages one student can receive over a week period, then publish the findings and work to change billboard regulations.

Seven Pieces of Essential Equipment

It may be hard to fathom, but there are seven "pieces" of equipment that are essential to your job. Many of them are items one might take for granted; we've listed them to highlight their importance.

1. Basic Office Setup

Your job will be nearly impossible without a basic office setup. You don't necessarily have to have your own office, but you do need a desk and chair, writing implements, paper, and a typewriter or computer. A computer is preferable, but remember: Many communicators came before you who only had a typewriter to beat out a flyer or newsletter. If you find yourself lacking any of these things, you'll need to requisition them before you go any farther.

2. Photocopier

You're in the business of getting information disseminated. You'll need a copier for daily communications and things like press releases, memos, and fact sheets. You probably won't have funds to send things like flyers and newsletters to a printer; don't worry, you can do them on the copier.

3. Telephone

Your job requires a lot of phone time. If you don't have one, it's absolutely essential that you get it, preferably a phone with voice mail or an answering machine so that you get your messages when you're out.

4. Automobile

You will need an automobile or, at least, have access to an automobile. Your job requires you to be out among your "constituents." That is, you need to get to board meetings, school sites, PTA meetings, volunteer gatherings, presentations, and the like. You need dependable transportation at your disposal constantly.

5. Overhead Projector

For meetings and presentations, it's a good idea to have a decent overhead projector. A portable one is ideal because there will be times that you'll have to make a presentation away from your office.

6. Meeting/Conference Space

You'll need a quiet space for meetings that's small enough for a few people, but large enough for a committee. This should be a working space that's well-lit, well-ventilated, and has an electrical outlet. The table(s) should be big enough to spread out papers and calendars.

7. This Communications Handbook

This handbook can be your best resource. Read it, highlight helpful parts, and write in the margins if you feel the need. This is your book, after all. Even if it is unauthorized.

CHAPTER 9

CONCLUSION

Well, if you've read every page up to here, we've nothing much more to say to you except "congratulations." And good luck with your new communications skills.

If you skipped the previous chapters, figuring the conclusion would highlight all the essential points in the book, we offer this brief summary of what we had to say.

Two Things to Keep in Mind if You Don't Read Anything Else in This Book

This entire book can be summarized in two statements. We offer them here in hopes they'll entice you back into the book where we discuss them in much greater detail.

1. Know Who You Intend to Communicate With

We know, this sounds simple. It isn't. You'll want to say you communicate with "students." Or "teachers." Or "parents." Or a whole host of other human beings you sort into categories called "audiences." Well, it isn't "communications" when your messages are not received or are ignored. Too much of what passes for communications is just wasted time and wasted resources. And that's because we're sending messages to the wrong people.

Who are the "right" people? Glad you asked. In a statement, though, the right people to communicate with are those who (a) share your opinion that the community or district has an AOD problem; (b) sense a personal involvement with the issue, perhaps because they have children in your schools or have seen the damage done to others by AOD abuse; and (c) believe they have the ability to do something about the problem.

2. Frame the Right Argument to the Right People

Folks only get excited about problems they recognize. Awhile back, a group of Americans headed to their caves in Montana because their spiritual leader said the world was coming to an end. They recognized a serious problem and organized to do something about it. The rest of us didn't buy the problem, so we ignored all communications that said we had better start packing and begin digging.

Even when we recognize a problem we frequently do nothing about it. Take the disappearing rain forests. Or acid rain. Or how about the hole in the ozone layer? Terrible problems, to be sure, but not the kind that keeps us up at night. The reason is twofold. First, we don't see how the problems involve us. They do, of course; we just don't see the connection. Second, we can't think of much of anything we could do about these problems if we wanted.

A lot of people, including school children, teachers, and parents, see alcohol and other drug abuse much the same way. Many just don't recognize it as a problem. Others see the problem, but don't think it involves them. And a lot of folks feel powerless to do anything about it.

We said in our first point that you ought to be communicating with the right people. And we said these were people who recognized the AOD issue, felt a sense of involvement with it, and felt as if they could do something about it.

Well, a lot of people on your mailing lists don't fit that right people definition. But many of them will be critical audiences for you. For example, you'll want to spread word about your program to your superintendent and school board, even if they don't fit the definition of our perfect audience.

But let's take these two audiences and talk about them for a paragraph or two. Let's say your superintendent recognizes the AOD problem, but doesn't appear really excited about it. Well, making the case that the district has got a problem won't increase the likelihood that the superintendent will do anything different as a consequence of your communications. What you have to do is send messages that stress the importance of the superintendent's personal involvement in the program if it's to succeed in bringing down AOD use in the community.

The school board may share the superintendent's view of the AOD situation. That is, the members recognize the problem, but have a hands-off attitude. You ought to be communicating the importance of their involvement to the program's success. But the members may also believe they are powerless to do anything about the problem, since it is a state-funded program and the guidelines come from outside the district. You are not likely to increase their involvement unless you free them from this constraining belief. You might do this by getting them to adopt some policies that mirror your program's guidelines. You might have a subset of them sit on your advisory committee. The more the board members feel empowered to act, the greater their involvement. And individuals who recognize a problem, organize to do something about it, and operate under few constraints constitute an actively communicating public.

By now you've probably concluded that this communications business is tough work. It is, if you're looking to succeed. If all you want to do is spread the word, then the chore is fairly easy. But if what you want is to deliver appropriate messages to receptive individuals, you're going to have your work cut out for you.

The book tells you about key audiences. We believe the most critical audience members are those who can hire and fire you. Or increase or decrease your funding. This is a small group that you can probably count on both hands. Next you have those who can help you make your program successful. We're now talking dozens of individuals. Throw in colleagues who work in the same field and we have a dozen more critical audience members. Finally, we come to the most critical audience of all: students in the community.

You could reach everyone on your list by mailing them the same brochure. But it wouldn't communicate effectively. Some of your audience members need to be convinced that there's a problem. Others among your audience know about the problem. They need to hear how it involves them. Still others need to be shown how they can overcome constraints that prevent them from addressing the problem.

The more you target your message to the individuals on your list of critical people, the more effective you will be. And the more you target messages to individuals, the greater the likelihood that you're going to be going face-to-face with people. Short of that, the printed word suffices. The trick, though, is to get the particular message to as many receptive people as possible without wasting your time and resources sending it to those who will ignore or forget it.

In our book we gave away a secret to the communications business. We said that people who recognize a problem, want to do something about it, and operate under few constraints, will seek out information. That's right; they'll come to you. You could tell them what to do with a grease pencil on the back of a packing crate and they would read the message and retain it. The point is, people seeking information to solve problems will work at the task of communicating.

People who do not seek information probably don't recognize the AOD problem or believe it involves them. Or they don't think they could do anything about it anyway. These are hard people to reach. While some will at least process the information you share with them, few will remember it for long or act upon it.

Given this situation, the wise AOD coordinator will ignore these passive communicating audiences.

We realize, of course, that some of the people the AOD coordinator must communicate with will fall into our passive group. The best we can suggest in these cases is that the AOD coordinator bring them along slowly. First work to increase awareness of the AOD problem among those who don't recognize it. Then encourage those who recognize the problem to become involved in addressing it. Finally, help those with constraints on their behavior to overcome their obstacles.

You have your work cut out for you. We wish you luck with the assignment.

HELPFUL RESOURCES

The following resources provide detailed information on the ideas presented in this book. Full bibliographic listings for these resources appear in the reference section of this guide.

A number of resources listed are published by the Office for Substance Abuse Prevention (OSAP) of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. OSAP has produced a number of excellent documents on prevention activities, communications tactics, and message delivery. Much of the material in OSAP documents is public domain (i.e., not copyrighted) and can be used or reproduced without permission from OSAP or the authors, although citation is appreciated. Consequently, OSAP is an excellent source for material.

A Guide to Working with the Media
Office for Substance Abuse Prevention

This document is an informative guide on how to interact successfully with the media. OSAP feels strongly about the need to learn how to work with the media. If you don't deal effectively with the media, then you will have little control over what is printed—particularly any speculation on the reporter's part.

This guide offers background material on why the media are important to your program; how to get their attention; how the media works; and tips for interviews and radio, newspaper, and television communications. The guide also offers specific hints on such issues as news conferences, what not to do when talking to the media, and how to prepare for a television appearance.

Communicating Effectively to Prevent Alcohol and Other Drug Problems

Office for Substance Abuse Prevention, OSAP Communications Team

As OSAP says on the first page of this guide, "If you are in the business of preventing alcohol and other drug problems...you're in the communications business."

This document gives a broad overview of how communications are an important part of AOD prevention. The document details OSAP's material review process, public health principles, scientific guidelines, and communications guidelines.

The document also highlights OSAP's SMOG test, a readability test for written communications. The SMOG test examines the number of polysyllabic words and arrays the number against grade and literacy level for maximum message communications.

Making PSAs Work: A Handbook for Health Communication Professionals

National Institutes of Health

This document is based on work done in a U.S. Department of Health and Human Services research project called the Health Message Testing Service. The guide has information on how to produce effective public service announcements (PSAs); how to create effective messages; and how to plan, test, implement, and evaluate a communications campaign based solely on PSAs.

Each chapter details the stages in a PSA campaign: strategy selection, concept development, message execution, implementation, assessment, and revision. Helpful appendices which detail PSAs on health, a questionnaire pretesting, and information clearinghouses and centers have been included.

Marketing Prevention: A Manual for Community-based Organizations

California Department of Alcohol and Drug Programs

This manual is a "how to" for AOD coordinators (and other personnel) who want to use marketing in their AOD use prevention efforts. Prevention, according to the authors, is the marketing of "health-enhancing" behaviors.

The manual is mainly for nonprofit or government agencies that rely on federal and state funds. The manual's main goal is to help you address the needs of your "beneficiaries," while addressing the needs of your "other constituents." The manual also offers information on marketing concepts, market segmentation, product packaging, strategic planning, and how to budget for and evaluate your marketing plan.

OSAP Prevention Monograph-5: Communicating About Alcohol and Other Drugs: Strategies for Reaching Populations at Risk

Elaine Bractic Arkin and Judith E. Funkhouser, Editors

According to OSAP, the purpose of the OSAP Prevention Monograph series is to "facilitate the transfer of prevention and intervention technology" among policymakers, educators, researchers, and others involved in AOD use prevention.

Monograph 5 presents strategies for preventing AOD use among high-risk youth and their families. Chapter 1 offers a comprehensive look at youth and families from high-risk environments. Other chapters target African American and Hispanic/Latino youth, primary care physicians, and parents.

In general, the monograph offers research and expert opinions on the audience, planning considerations, knowledge, attitudes, practices, and recommendations.

The monograph also includes appendices on the OSAP material review process, the OSAP style sheet for AOD terminology, and information about the Regional Alcohol and Drug Awareness Resources (RADAR) Network.

OSAP Prevention Monograph-6: Youth and Drugs: Society's Mixed Messages

Hank Resnik, Editor

This volume of the OSAP Prevention Monograph series examines the influences of society that foster the use of alcohol and other illicit and licit drugs. It examines "the ways in which the current social, cultural, and policy aspects of the environment contribute to drug use and can be marshaled to reduce the demand for drugs" (p. 3).

Specifically, this monograph examines the "mixed messages" that are sent to youth. It also looks at policies and practices aimed at reducing and eliminating AOD problems.

Prevention Plus II: Tools for Creating and Sustaining Drug-Free Communities

Office for Substance Abuse Prevention

This publication offers help to communities trying to adopt comprehensive substance abuse prevention programs. It aims to help those planning and implementing a program to develop a "comprehensive systems approach" to prevent AOD use. Such an approach is based on the research findings that prevention programs cannot work in a vacuum. Program components must be brought together so that every part of the community is involved and the needs of all populations in the community are addressed.

The manual deals with the impact of AOD use prevention efforts and the systems approach and offers a planning guide and case studies of comprehensive prevention efforts. Detailed appendices look at the physical and psychological effects of AODs; the signs of AOD use; directories for national, state, and territorial prevention networks; how to launch a media campaign; and theories and models of current prevention programs.

Providing Alternative Activities: A Guide to Expanding School-based Prevention

Ann S. Bickel

This guide provides concrete examples of school-based prevention strategies not implemented in the classroom. It examines the importance of adding nonclassroom strategies and activities and discusses the goals of such actions. Strategies include awareness campaigns, after-school programs, peer helper programs, teen conferences, support groups, and mentor programs.

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